

# Saint Jude Program

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The Definitive Guide to Self-Directed Neuroplastic Change

From the Research & Development Team  
at Baldwin Research Institute Inc.

13th Edition Revision 1

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# Acknowledgements

While in the past Jerry Brown and I authored the St. Jude Program® and the presentation staff of Baldwin Research Institute's retreats co-authored the workbooks, this new edition was organized a bit differently. All of the following people brought their expertise to Baldwin Research Institute, and consequently, made the 13th Edition of the St. Jude Program® the most valuable substance use program of its time.

First and foremost, credit must be given to Jerry Brown, a world renowned researcher in his own right, my long time friend, mentor and a Baldwin Research Institute Sr. Fellow, who co-founded BRI and the St. Jude Retreats® with me in 1992. After co-writing the St. Jude Program® 13 times, Jerry's and my co-writing process is now second nature. And, as a researcher of many years in an internationally distinguished research and development laboratory, Jerry does not leave anything on the table. If he disagrees with a concept or claim I make in the book, I know it, and I'm forced to prove my case. This single-minded focus has made the St. Jude Program® evolve over the past 24 years, where other programs across the nation have held steadfastly to methods that have proven false and/or are simply ineffective.

Mr. Steven Slate, a long time friend and employee of BRI, a researcher and the author of [www.thecleanslate.org](http://www.thecleanslate.org) was added to the writing team as an official BRI co-author. This brought unforeseen benefits to the writing process. Steve was able to fine tune each macro concept and fill in much of the research data. His countless discussions with me and his fearless critiques of the program concepts helped to articulate what was being conveyed to the reader. He also personally wrote several of the new ABSA chapters and built the notes and citations section, thus adding a new level of detail to the entire process offered our guests and readers.

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BRI thanks our dedicated Board of Directors for their support and encouragement throughout this development process.

Also Ms. Cheryl Curtis, St. Jude's Senior Director of Retreat House Operations, as well as the entire CBE certified presenters and retreat house staffs must be acknowledged for their input. Each chapter was read by them, and then their critiques were presented to the writers through a series of workshops and meetings. These meetings proved to be illuminating, to say the least. We were encouraged by their expert analysis of the content, and their knowledge of "what guests want and need." Our back and forth communication with these staffers during the entire year of program development added a higher level of logic and flow to the program. After their input, the 13th Edition of the St. Jude Program was completely reorganized into this systematic human development program.

In all the years of developing the non-treatment model, never has there been such a wealth of new research offered to the public in a single cohesive program. Credit must be given to the hundreds of thousands of hours of new research that have been conducted by credible researchers in neuroscience, genetics, and sociology. While the United States unfortunately continues down the Control Model path for treatment of substance use, new research is constantly being published to refute the claims of Control

Model Treatment. BRI is grateful for all those researchers who continue with their labors that repeatedly confirm that Control Model Treatment programs are completely ineffective and that Cognitive Based Programs do work. There are many of these researchers quoted in this text, and you can find them listed in the notes and citations.

We are grateful for the enormous amount that we learned from the many thousands of guests who attended the St. Jude Retreats and the many more who used the St. Jude Home Program and who were kind enough to keep in touch letting us know about their successes.

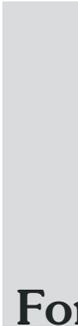
Last, but certainly not least, I must give a special thank you to my wife, Danielle, who has remained supportive during these many years of edition rewrites, and for having the courage to tell me if my ideas were off-base or needed rethinking. As a somewhat objective party, she has my ear, and it has proven valuable through the many hard fought years of building the CBE® approach that finally came to fruition in the completion of this, the 13th Edition of the St. Jude Program®.

To all, a heartfelt thank you.

Mark Scheeren, Chairman

Baldwin Research Institute, Inc.

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# Forward

by Reaume Carroll Mulry, Ph.D.

In my years working in the field of human development, substance use and abuse, self-management of personal health and self-mastery skills training, I have yet to witness dedication to a mission as I have with Baldwin Research Institute, Inc. (the parent research not-for-profit company of the St. Jude Retreats). I have observed their work and explored their challenging ideas during our many hours of thoughtful conversation. These conversations have been open ended, always seeking a better understanding of human motivation and human development.

Much of this involved discussion of free will and our unique ability as thinking individuals to shape our lives. For some, the argument over the existence of free will may never end. For William James it ended with his decision, "My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will." Baldwin Research made a similar decision decades ago when they opened their first of several St. Jude Retreats, and has faithfully carried that decision forward, helping thousands evolve a life of their particular choosing.

The scientific community has contributed greatly to our understanding of the power of will, as revealed in the many discoveries and revelations regarding the neuroplasticity of the brain. In Dr. Schwartz's stirring book "The Mind and the Brain" he offers convincing scientific evidence of our ability to create the life we want to live, even to the point of physically reshaping the neural circuitry of our brain. This news inspires discerning minds when considering human potential and our capacity for positive behavior change. There are multiple books emerging on the scientific scene collectively validating BRI's emphasis on willful determination of one's own destiny.

BRI has thoughtfully engaged their guests and staff, in an ongoing quest for useful knowledge regarding our evolving capacity to shape our personal future. As Goethe once said, "Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do." Herein stands the promise of Baldwin Research, steadfast in its support of the power of choice and our ability to shape a life of our particular choosing. Indeed, after millions of years of human brain development, we have arrived with frontal lobes that actually work. We think. We make decisions. We choose. We do what it takes to continuously adapt to an ever changing environment.

As you progress through St. Jude's, you will encounter The Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation, Relative Happiness, The Control Model, the Origination of Thought Debate, the Five Universal Axioms, the Science of Personal Change, the Plastic Brain, Axiom Based Self-Analysis, the Law of Attraction, and more.

In writing this forward, I remain confident you, the reader, will engage your intelligence, your freedom of choice, your ability to separate useful knowledge from prejudice regarding an often presumed powerlessness of individuals labeled as addicts. As you explore the works of Baldwin Research, you will encounter new views of old ideas, and you will measure their worth.

It has been said of William James, he challenged his colleagues not to let a narrow mindset prevent an honest appraisal of their particular beliefs. I believe you will find Baldwin Research offers a similar challenge in the pages herein.

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# Introduction

## *A few words from the Research Team at Baldwin Research Institute, Inc. and the St. Jude Retreats...*

BRI's greatest asset is our people; those who work to build our programs, those who present our life changing programs, those who care for our guests and of course you, our guests/readers, to whom we humbly dedicate ourselves to serve. BRI is a group of dedicated researchers, authors and retreat employees who have been changing the world for a quarter century by providing the most effective programs in the nation for those with alcohol and drug problems. When all is said and done, BRI's focused goal is to help individuals become happier and more fulfilled human beings.

With that said the St. Jude Program Series® tackles more than just the challenges within each of us; we are constantly raising questions about the American "addiction culture" (hereinafter referred to as the recovery society) and correcting the constant barrage of misinformation that it disseminates. What is contained in this text is a method for you to overcome the cultural shift of the last seventy years here in America, and more recently abroad, which has systematically rejected the ideals of personal responsibility for one's actions, allowing for a victim mentality to overrun our culture. Individuals must steadfastly cling to the natural principle of personal responsibility so as not to yield to the constant onslaught of misinformation that teaches potential believers that they are powerless and seemingly out of control. Only by embracing personal responsibility for everything in one's life can individuals pursue their dreams and passions with effective and consistent vigor.

In this program we address the very serious issues of substance use and the many additional emotional problems and behaviors that result from substance use. Also, the program deals with the current belief systems of the recovery society that promote the complete loss of personal autonomy, personal power and personal choice. Self-limiting belief systems (e.g. loss of personal power and "out-of-control" behaviors) render people, and in some cases whole cultures, hopeless and searching for answers outside of themselves. With this external locus of control, (i.e. "Rehab is the answer to my addictions"), the adherence to an external force being the path to wellbeing becomes the focus of existence. Unfortunately, this intense concentration on outside forces being the answer for personal struggles, (i.e. needing treatment to overcome "addiction") ends with the exact opposite result, increased dependence on the recovery society. By believing that the answer to personal struggles comes from people or institutions outside of the individual, these same individuals become puppets of the professionals and just another endless cog in the treatment industry wheel. Thus, these people surrender even more of their personal strength and confidence by adhering to the recovery society's empty promises. Current research clearly shows that just the opposite is true: the less an individual is exposed to treatment, the better off the individual is. Those who can muster up a belief in themselves can, and do, take control and rebuild their lives to better circumstances.

The seriousness of BRI's responsibility to provide real answers to people in deep, life threatening situations with excessive substance use and other damaging behaviors and habits, demands that the plan presented in these pages must not only be thought out carefully, but also courageously. America is in a culture war in regards to how to deal with substance use and how to help those who seem to have lost control. The recovery society creates a culture of dependence on the treatment system, itself. It recklessly diagnoses false diseases, misleads normal people to believe that they are mentally ill, and victimizes (both emotionally and financially) the families of those whose loved ones are in treatment. The very word "treatment" is misleading, in and of itself. There is no disease of "addiction", yet, we "treat" people in an attempt to control their behaviors. The burgeoning treatment industry secures its own future with misinformation; and, it keeps the unaware customer perpetually in need of being "treated" by its "professionals."

This same treatment industry has not helped our society find solutions for the problem of heavy drinking and drugging, and its accompanying life issues. Rather, there is a continuous cry for more treatment, more programs, more public and private funding; and, alas a hysterical outcry demanding that people enter treatment in greater numbers and at younger and younger ages. Dependence on the treatment system has become the cultural mantra of the recovery society.

Yet, after more than seventy years of the recovery society paradigm pushing for an ever increasing influence in our overall culture, the simple fact is this: the problem of excessive substance use habits continues to rise as the influence of the treatment industry gains traction. In other words, the more our society cries out for more treatment, the more candidates are created for such a system. One must ask, after seventy years of a highly funded, now publically accepted, disease-based treatment system, would not the number of those “afflicted with the disease” go down? Isn’t that the goal of any “treatment,” to make things better? But not so in the shaded, protected, falsely medicalized field of “addiction.” People keep building treatment centers, therapy models, and they emphasize loss of control to the point where belief in it has now created the reality of it. People come to believe in their addiction and they die there. The recovery society has been built and accepted.

BRI, the St. Jude Program Series®, and BRI’s Cognitive Behavioral Education® methods developed over the past two decades are the answer; they effectively compete against the recovery society’s destructive techniques. By presenting the truth to one person at a time, we present individuals with information on how to implement self-directed change; we provide the facts and science that refute the idea of personal powerlessness in regards to behavior and choice, and we provide the information necessary to allow people to reacquaint themselves with their talents, passions and abilities. In short, we reverse the recovery society’s negative influence and propaganda, and then provide the necessary information for individuals to build their own natural resiliency and to self-create a more productive future. We have created the NON-TREATMENT approach for substance use issues, and we provide a seasoned and experienced team that present real solutions for substance use problems.

While the last 25 years of developing the non-treatment approach has been an uphill climb, the St. Jude Program Series® has been widely accepted throughout the world. We have received guests and readers from as far away as Africa and Australia, had guests ranging in age from 12 to 82 years old, and received guests at our residential retreats from a multitude of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. The lessons of personal power and individual autonomy are as important to people today as they have been throughout mankind’s history. The positive principles and axioms of the universe do not play favorites, but knowing those axioms and principles remains the most effective way for each and every person to find their calling and their personal mission. It is the goal of the St. Jude Programs® to provide the catalyst for discovering your dreams and aspirations without degrading labels, false disease propaganda, or questionable and/or damaging methods and the attendant negative consequences.

During this comprehensive program you will learn how to build the path to greater understanding of your problems, and then you can self-create your personal solutions for your own specific personal issues. We, here at BRI, look forward to hearing about your success story and witnessing the power of your human spirit as it triumphs over all external circumstances!

## Allegory of the Sun

Imagine that the sun represents life. The sun is light and warmth, and it creates the ability to navigate and function for all the creatures of the Earth. Now, further imagine that you were born onto a large, flat, smooth surface where all the necessities of life are available for the taking. Food is provided from the sun's energy. This, in turn, nourishes you, and keeps you alive. You do not need shelter because it is always the perfect temperature, and there is always the perfect amount of light.

You and the others born here grow up together in ease and comfort. Every day the warmth of the sun brings smiles to you and the other children. Every day is full of playfulness and happiness, tranquility and peace. Then something happens. As you grow older you begin to question why life works the way it does. Your travels and perception of the world broaden.

Around this time, let's say you're seven years old, someone hurts you, and you react with anger. At the exact instant that you choose to feel anger a small boulder appears in front of you. Just like that, BOOM! You have seen this happen to other people, but never before to you. You don't know how the rock appeared or from where, but it was clear that bad or negative thoughts or actions brought about this strange phenomenon.

Sometimes the rocks are small and other times they are jagged and large as a house. You notice as you get older that some of the other young men and women have a lot of these boulders in their living areas while others have none at all. Occasionally, during difficult times, a few stones appear around you. You learn to accept this, but wonder why this kept happening.

Then one day on your way to go play with some friends, you pass by a man about 30 years old who is surrounded so completely by boulders he can no longer move. There are so many rocks that their shadows cover him in a thick blanket of darkness. You can't actually see him, but you can hear him crying. He sits there wailing and cursing

the darkness. He curses everyone for abandoning him. Every time you pass, you try to help him, but he is so busy yelling that you can't get him to hear you. "He must be insane," you think to yourself, "only crazy people act that way." Every day you pass this man, and it begins to bother you. Why does the world work this way?

A furious, sickening feeling of resentment wells up inside you. It's just not fair! Suddenly a shooting pain darts from your foot to your knee. When you look down you see that a large jagged rock has pinned your foot to the smooth earth. You look around for help, but the only people close to you at this moment are others in the same predicament. Some are completely buried, others only partially. To your left you can see your friends playing happily, but they are too far from you to hear your cries for help.

Instantly, you become jealous of them and another boulder lands in front of you. You curse, and another rock appears.

Now you are in the shade. The pile is getting deeper, and the sunlight can no longer reach you. You feel a part of you slowly dying. Each time another boulder lands rage wells up inside of you. Now the rocks are

piling so fast it seems uncontrollable and overwhelming. The pain becomes almost unbearable.

Fear fills your heart and with it, more rocks! Frightened and furious you scream for the boulders to stop. Without sunlight you cannot find your way out of this horrible nightmare, so you demand that the sunlight find you! But nothing happens. Why, you ask, does life have to be this way? Self-pity dominates your thoughts accompanied by anger and arrogance. The rock walls close in and your movements are restricted until you are left totally immobile.

If the sun will not shine on your terms, well, then you will simply live in darkness; and that is just what you do. Weeks, months and then years pass by and your anger continues to build, first at the sun, and then at humanity for abandoning you. "This is so unfair," you say to yourself, "Why do these rocks keeping falling on me?"

“ Occasionally, during difficult times, a few stones appear around you. You learn to accept this, but wonder why this kept happening. ”

You feel cold and uncomfortable and you slowly have become crippled by the weight of the rocks now pinning you down.

You hear happy people pass by and you sit and shiver. They ask if you want help. You yell back, "Where were you before when I wanted help?! I don't want anything from you now. Besides, I'm fine. Do I look as if I need your help?" Even as you say this you feel completely embarrassed by your pathetic situation. Their words of pity and compassion only make you angrier. 'How dare they pity me?' you think to yourself. Another passerby offers his assistance. You want to make sure these people understand that under no condition would you ever want their help, now or in the future! After all, you have everything under control. You reply, "Get away from me! I'm not a charity case. Go bother someone else." More rocks crush you in the silence and darkness.

As the years go by, you become accustomed to the dark. Memories of the good years haunt you and you curse life for giving you such pain. As you grow older, you begin to see that your life could be filled with darkness and despair forever. The light and warmth of your childhood are now distant memories and difficult to recall. You are cold, uncomfortable, and afraid. You give way to despair, and finally accept that this will be your lot in life. You feel that there is no reason for you to be alive. Year after year, your mind contains only a habitual negative thoughts and your connection to the light and heat of the sun are now so distant it seems impossible that you will ever experience them again. You begin to wonder if the sun ever actually existed.

You wonder if your memories are real or just some crazy childhood fantasy. You feel hopeless. Your hatred for mankind grows, as does the weight of the pile. Your self-pity is piling up on you and almost killing you. Day in and day out you brood over the injustice of this horrible life and despair. You want to die, but can't find the courage to kill yourself. Deep in your heart you know that your thinking is flawed, but your pride cloaks the harsh truth: that all of this misery is your responsibility.

Then one day you remember that pathetic man from your childhood trapped in the enormous pile of rock and, in a moment of lucidity, you realize that you have become that wretched man. Memories resurface and things you have not thought about in years flood your consciousness: The time when your life was filled with the joy of running free with the friends you loved, the sun on your back, and the smell of flowers in the air, a time when you knew nothing about loneliness.

You begin to cry. You feel as if you live in hell and now you begin to wonder if this is a hell that you have created. You whimper one simple statement to yourself, "I can't live like this anymore – please help me." Then with all the strength you have left, you scream, "Help me—please help me!!"

Suddenly, from far away, you hear a voice shouting through the maze of stone; "Is someone in this pile?"

You keep screaming for help. The claustrophobia has become unbearable. "Please find me," you keep yelling. Over the next few days, you notice that the crippling weight of the stones above you eases a bit and a few small rays of light filter through the darkness.

Your eyes squint and sting from the brightness. As the sunlight begins to illuminate the place where you have been living you see how unsightly it really is. For a moment you think that remaining in the darkness might be better. At least in the dark you did not have to look at your situation. You can hear voices from outside calling that they will help you get out as long you are willing to keep trying to communicate. You say, "Yes, yes, I am willing."

And you strain and force yourself to move. The pain is excruciating, blood flows hot through your body, and your head pounds. You are able to move just enough for the stones to move slightly, and sunlight begins to stream through the holes you jarred open. People are now surrounding the pile. You can hear them. For several days they slowly pull away the weighted mass above you, making it easier for you to move. The sunlight continues to filter in bringing increasing heat and light. You can hear people talking as they work, saying things such as, "I didn't even know there was someone in this mountain. I've been walking by it for years."

You hear another person warn, "Get ready to help him; he will not be able to see very well. He will be weak. Sometimes these people are in pretty rough shape." These statements frighten you. For the first time in years you can move enough to take a look at your hands, arms and legs and you are uncomfortable at what you see. You wish for a brief moment that the sunlight would go away so no one, including yourself, could see what you have become.

As soon as you have this thought you hear cries from above, "Be careful! The pile is collapsing!" A familiar crushing weight overwhelms your weak frame. The sunlight and warmth are almost completely shut off again, but a few beams still filter through. The people's voices, more faint now, seem frantic. They are yelling, "I can't see him anymore! Move that rock! Hurry, get the excavating machine."

You realize that it is time to make a decision. If they are to find you before the weight and darkness crush the life out of you, you will have to cooperate and take action. With all the strength you have left you scream so they can once again locate you in the mass. Your weakened heart pounds and doubt grips you. What if the sun can't make enough light for the people to find me? What if I am too embarrassed to face the healthy people above me? What if I manage to live another 20 years in this rocky prison? What if, what if, what if...? You begin to weep.

Even with doubt and fear racing uncontrollably through your very soul you continue to scream so the excavators can locate you. Although fear consumes your mind, your mounting faith and courage provide needed hope. For the first time in years you must rely on your strength and on the sunlight to shine brightly enough for you to be found. It is not the same as when you were a child. In those days the sun was always shining down upon you. You never lived in shadows, so you knew nothing but sunshine and smiles. Life was good, and it was easy. Youth is like that. Now the light feels painful and uncomfortable and, yet, it is vaguely familiar and... well... it's warm.

Faith is a difficult concept for you. You learned about it when you were younger, and you never really understood it. You can have faith in what is right in front of you, things you can control, but now you have to have faith in the goodness of a world that has hurt you, in a system called life that allows for pain and darkness as well as sunlight and happiness.

You are standing at a crossroads in your weakened condition and must either continue the fight or be crushed one last time. With tears streaming down your face, you decide to continue the fight and yield to the laws and rules of this world. Almost immediately your arrogance, fear and sadness begin to fall away. You begin to realize the vast amount of energy it took to be unhappy all those years.

Suddenly, you feel hands and two strangers reach in and pull your limp body out of the excavated hole. What you witness through painful eyes is startling. Squinting, you see what looks like a dormant volcano composed of thousands of stones. You are overwhelmed with emotion as tears of joy flow. The first thing you notice is happy faces of those who worked so hard to help you, but what you notice next is almost too much for you: the sun is in exactly same location it was when you saw it last years ago as you walked down the street, learning how to hate and fear life. The sun never went away, you did.

As the strangers help you out of the crater, the horror of your rocky prison overwhelms your senses. It is a monument to fear and a physical manifestation of a determination to be right in spite of the pain it has caused. It is a prison built from an unwillingness to accept the idea that life could be difficult but that you have to remain positive, nonetheless. Unhappiness, arrogance, and adolescent pride created the barrier between you and the life-preserving sunlight. Those who have helped you are now saying that it is your fault you lived in this hellish prison, and that your adult life has been postponed because of your choice to hide from it.

They remind you that people were willing to help you from the time that first jagged boulder landed on your foot when you were young. They explain how the sun and all its warmth were always there; it was just that you built a fortress that blocked it out. Now, they say, if you want to truly be and remain free, you must accept this as the truth. You eagerly agree, because you now know that anything is better than the way you have been living --anything!

They say you have to begin by figuring out how each boulder was made. They say that although you may rebel at the thought that you created the stone prison, if you look at each and every stone and describe honestly what you see, it will become quite obvious that each was fashioned by your own mind from your thoughts, decisions, and actions. The sun did

not leave you; you built a fort that blocked you from having a happy life. You have ignored the fact that every time you made a decision based on self-limiting talk you were creating a barrier to the outside.

You had convinced yourself that the boulders were constructed and controlled by the sun and came out of thin air to punish you. Now you see how silly and tragic this belief was. The sun never moved from its place in the sky. Its presence was unwavering. You realize that the way you connected its presence to the rocks was irrational. While it is now becoming obvious to you that the sun did not create the boulders, it sure seemed believable then. Those were the thoughts of an adolescent who was unwilling to accept adulthood.

Your own scripts allowed for this self-limiting thinking. You decided a long time ago to lie to those around you about the countless hours you spent constructing each and every stone. The rest of the world watched you with pity as you spent every waking moment sculpting each negative emotion into a boulder or jagged stone, a process of slow, self-indulgent martyrdom. While you

“ *The sun will continue to shine and you will remain as energized as you were when you were a child playing with your friends for hours on end.* ”

were constructing the prison of darkness in which you might have remained for the rest of your life, you blamed everyone for not helping you get out.

If the sun never stopped shining and you are responsible for the rocks that imprisoned you, and each one is labeled and signed with your name, it is obviously time to stop building the imprisoning walls. It is certainly time to stop being so arrogant and begin living a mature life. Suddenly you can remember making the decision to cop-out on life, to give up and hide from the sun, and from a life that seemed too difficult to face. All the memories of building the awful fortress come flooding back. Every stone, whether jagged or smooth, large or small, has a negative memory associated with it. These memories open the door to an epiphany: for years you have tried to convince others that you were the victim of some cosmic fate. But now you can finally admit that it is your fault. Then you realize with overwhelming relief; this means you have the power to change it.

You are now armed with the truth. Your newfound friends instruct you how to classify and dispose of the prison piece by piece. This will take some effort, but you begin and it feels good. Each time you throw a stone in the crusher the memory of it diminishes. Each disposed-of stone is one that you decide will never be used again. There are times when your faith in the future is tested. You have to rely on the simple idea that life will not always happen on your terms and how you react to the way it does happen decides your fate. You realize that it has always been up to you. The sun will shine—forever. The decision to stay in the sun or not is completely up to you.

Within a short period of time, about six weeks, you become an expert in disposal techniques, and you have become much stronger from the hard physical work. There are days when you wish the pile would simply disappear. But you realize that this is your job. The sun's job is to shine, to provide enough light so that you can take care of business, while the mess is yours to clean up, and the future is yours to build.

Your newfound friends stay by your side and give you advice, direction, and encouragement. They keep telling you that you have to work hard to stay in the sunshine, even when you feel you do not deserve to be. They also tell you that, although the sun is not directly on you at all times as you walk through life, you are always receiving enough light. Sometimes in life you may walk through the shadows thrown by someone else's mountainous creation, and the sun may not be in direct view. But because of your experience you now have faith and confidence that the sun is still there, even when it is temporarily out of direct sight.

For years the sun has been waiting patiently to shine on you once again. Because of its light you were able to see your signature on the rocks with clarity. This all makes sense to you now.

At this point you dispose of the last stones because it seems silly to do anything less. It feels so good to be back in the light—too good to leave any stone in place. Your friends let you know there is still more work to do—much more. The only way to avoid building a new prison is to make absolutely certain you do not allow the old thoughts and habits to overtake you again.

This is not hard because now that you have found out the truth about yourself and how childishly you had been living, you would never want go back to that. The sun's rays are revitalizing you, but as the days wear on, boredom creeps in, and new goals must be set. Although your life has improved considerably, there has to be more to it than sitting in the sunshine taking up space. It is now time for you to become a mature adult. This is an honor, but it also scares you. You are not used to being productive. However, you remind yourself that you climbed out of a horrendous self-created mess and achieved peace, so anything is possible.

As a starting point you begin by trying to remember the dreams you had as a child. You are now ready to dream again and start setting and achieving new goals. This new life is uncharted territory. As the years pass, your eyes, limbs, and heart grow healthy and strong. You have the knowledge that good things come to those who work hard and care for the others around them. You feel strong and confident, able to tackle obstacles in life that once seemed impossible. You realize that faith in yourself grows stronger as your confidence and experience grow.

As time passes you discover that adulthood is not something to be feared, but should be enjoyed with action and love for others. You see that the only real difference between your mature life and those days of easy youthful living is that your new playfulness has a much greater impact on the world than your years of negativity. The sun will continue to shine and you will remain as energized as you were when you were a child playing with your friends for hours on end. This is your job from now until your death—to be happy, so you can pass this on to the next generation. Let the light become a working part of you, until you can shine as brightly as the sun itself.

## CHAPTER 1

# An Introduction to Your New Life

*“Happiness is a matter of one’s most ordinary and everyday mode of consciousness being busy and lively and unconcerned with self.”*

– Iris Murdoch, British Author

### Module Number 1: Shedding the Addict/Alcoholic Identity

The first module (series of topic headings and chapters) deals with permanently solving the substance use problem, whether by reducing your consumption or deciding to abstain from use altogether. The substance use issue needs to be dealt with in this first module for the simple fact that many of our guests believe this is their primary issue; drug and/or alcohol use. You may well learn exactly how to become powerful over substances and also, more importantly, how to see substances for what they really are: that is, inert matter, not powerful, living, breathing enemies as the recovery society makes them out to be.

You will also learn how to disconnect your substance use from your other life challenges and issues. This is very important and critical to your long-term success. In today’s recovery society, the general public unfortunately adheres to many misleading beliefs about addictions, such as the existence of “underlying issues that cause addictions.” This belief, like others about addiction, is only true to the extent that society has made this cultural view believable, and then these beliefs are reinforced with actions and behaviors. For example, if you believe depression fuels your addiction, then it does. You become depressed and then you drink and/or drug which in turn refuels your depression. This cycle constantly reinforces the belief making it more powerful with each passing day.

Conversely, if you do not believe depression fuels your addiction, then it doesn’t and it won’t. It all comes down to what you believe and how you decide to address your life troubles that will make the process of fixing these various problems either efficient or a drawn out, complicated mess. Our goal here is to simplify the problem solving process, so you can move on to a happier existence.

The perception that “underlying issues cause addictions” does not have to remain a part of your thinking or your reality. We will demonstrate how you can make your substance use a singular issue to be addressed, and your other lifestyle issues such as depression, anxiety, marital troubles, career troubles, etc. separate singular issues to be addressed on their own. By disconnecting “addiction” from other life issues described here, each becomes amazingly easier to address and fix. It is a wonderful freedom to know that each of your current problems; whether it is drinking and/or drugging, depression, anxiety, stress, legal issues, etc., can be looked at as a single problem with its own solution(s) and then addressed as such. What power! What clarity! No more need for never-ending support and therapy!

The best way to explain this process is to imagine a cancerous tumor that had its origin in the stomach but now has spread by growing cancerous tentacles to the lungs and throughout the lower intestines and legs. To surgically operate in this severe case would require a very complex procedure that might prove fatal. That is exactly what the recovery society has done with the concept

of “addiction.” What started out as a simple accurate definition of heavy substance use at the beginning of the last century, i.e. people drink and drug to be happy, has now grown tentacles to include all other human troubles like depression, anxiety, stress and life in general. Like the tentacles from the original cancerous tumor, somehow our society has connected drinking and drugging with previously unrelated common aspects of life such as unhappiness, depression, elation, anxiety, apathy, etc. The list of connective tentacles of this misleading theory is literally, endless.

Let us separate the drinking and drugging activity from the many other already difficult aspects of life that are simply a part of the human experience. By this separation process you will gain complete control over both substance use problems and your other life issues! The value of unplugging the choice to drink and drug from the other aspects and circumstances of your life cannot be overstated – it unplugs the source of power you have provided to your “addictions”. This is a revolutionary concept that simplifies the most complex troubles and builds a natural problem solving tool chest for each individual. This separation technique will allow you to problem solve one issue at a time and then move on to a freer state of mind and body!

This module will also explain the Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation in detail, as well as how Cognitive Behavioral Education® (CBE®) nonjudgmental teaching methods make it very easy to learn. The Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation simply consists of the following factual statement along with its implications in human life and decision making:

All people always move in the direction of what they believe will make them happier in any given moment in time.

The Freedom Model® is the foundation for all motives for decision-making. In short, you are always in the pursuit of happiness. ALWAYS. Therefore, it makes sense that none of your presenters judge you or your behaviors, or tell you that your current lifestyle is wrong or bad, since you have chosen your personal happiness in your current state. You have, thus far, simply sought happiness the best way you knew how. A question we will pose many times throughout the text is this: is it possible that there might be alternatives that may provide greater happiness than the choices you are currently making? Think of the possibilities that could be explored if you were to expand your thought processes. The concept of a self-directed, ever-changing brain (i.e. neuroplasticity) allows for you to reinvent yourself over and over again.

The science of Neuroplasticity is covered in detail in this section of the text, as well. This particular topic, the topic of changing the brain through thoughts, habits and behaviors,

is critical for understanding how amazingly powerful humans really are. The neuroplasticity chapter is very popular chapter with our guests with good reason. It is based on well-researched science that provides another tool for massive positive self-change, proactive lifestyle adaptation skills and builds on positive self-created brain changes.

And finally, the very real possibility of shedding the “addict/alcoholic” identity is covered in detail in the first module. The idea of controlling your habits may sound like sacrilege to some who have been exposed to treatment. This module is very detailed and has been well-researched so guests can make informed and carefully planned decisions in regards to their substance use habits, regardless of their exposure to recovery society propaganda.

Once these fundamental topics are completed and you have decided to address your substance use issue with your newfound power, you will move on to Module Number Two, Axiom-Based Self-Analysis.

## Module Number 2: Axiom Based Self-Analysis (ABSA)

Baldwin Research has invested more than two decades of research to understand why people do the things they do. Over that span of time we have found five universal truths that level the playing field of life for everyone, regardless of culture, moral views, politics, or the ever-changing societies humans live in throughout the world. These truths, or axioms as we call them, guide our lives whether we know it or not. The Five Universal Axioms are:

1. Change is constant.
2. You are what you think.
3. Happiness is the only cognitive motivator in the human condition.
4. There is no shortcut to sustainable, stable, long-term happiness.
5. Your happiness is in your own hands.

These truths will be explained in minute detail. Once you have a thorough understanding of them, you will spend some time analyzing your past and present behaviors against the reality of these axioms. You will discover where you have implemented these axioms to your benefit and where you may have worked counter to them causing much needless grief. By analyzing your past in this manner, you gain an acute sense of the axioms and

how they can promote happiness. This axiom-based self-analysis process provides a path for positive change and mastery over problems that once seemed insurmountable. This is a very illuminating and fascinating module of the program.

Other topics that will be discussed throughout this module are: dealing with difficult relationships, productively addressing legitimate suffering, rising above emotional pain, and understanding how to problem solve more effectively.

### **Module Number 3: Life Movements**

The Life Movements module is eight full chapters devoted to presenting information on how you can build your future. There is so much exciting information in this portion of the process that to cover it all here would take several chapters. So, below is a list of topic headings and a brief explanation of each topic. This will give you a sampling of where you are headed when you reach this module of the program. We hope it inspires you, as the process you will experience in this module will result in you to plan a purposeful, driven, and exciting future. It is our experience that this portion of the program inspires guests like no other. Here are the twelve main topics that will be addressed in Life Movements:

- **Self-Image.** This topic is devoted to helping you decide who you want to be, both externally and internally. All of the lessons will be based on this image. For example, do your future goals for intimate relationships match who you desire to be in your new self-image? Do your future career goals match the self-image you have chosen for your future? And so on.
- **Relationships.** The topic of relationships and, more importantly, future relationships is addressed here. Relationships are, in fact, the main fabric of each person’s existence and a further exploration of where you might want to change and/or enhance your relationships is covered in detail.
- **Living in the Moment.** This age-old saying is covered in this module as you get closer to the goal setting portion of the program. There is a balance between working toward an exciting future and also enjoying the ride getting there.
- **The Fear of Emotional Risk** as well as how to overcome self-limiting thoughts and the behaviors associated with them.
- **Guilt** and how to overcome a past filled with unfortunate and sometimes destructive habits.

- **Forgiveness.** This topic covers both forgiving yourself as well as others. We have found this topic to be one of the more popular topics and a life-changing topic for our guests.
- **The Process of Self-Directed Change.** This process is thought-based, replacing self-limiting thoughts with self-expansive, positive thoughts. It is a neuroplastic change exercise – you will learn how you can “change your own brain.”
- **Shattering Self-Limits.** Here you will learn techniques to mentally and emotionally travel farther than you have ever traveled before. You will learn how to see the future through positive eyes and stretch what you believe is possible. This is a fundamental lesson that builds a positive foundation for goal setting.
- **Purpose and Drive.** Both of these topics need to be fully understood and identified in your life to reach your true potential.
- **Discovering Joy.** Joy can be a misunderstood concept. We clarify the definition of joy and explain the various levels of happiness that can be attained by anyone who wishes to improve their life. Joy is the highest level of happiness and thus it deserves a thorough explanation and path to attain it.
- **Passion.** This topic covers various definitions of passion, but the thrust of this topic will be geared toward passion becoming the fuel for setting and attaining your goals.
- **Goals.** Complete the Plan for Going Home. This chapter ties all of the information together through a solid, practical and positive method for living your future plan. Your future plans will fulfill your new self-images and provide a pathway to personal joy!

### **Let’s Get Started**

Now that you have a good idea of what to expect in the next several weeks, let us begin.

In order to start the process of taking control and possibly rebuilding your life, we the authors, make two assumptions based simply on the fact that you are reading this text:

First, we assume that you believe that you have a problem with alcohol and/or drugs, or another behavior(s) and that you have thought about abstaining from using them or adjusting your usage to more personally rewarding levels.

And, second, we assume that you have a desire for some level of personal change that is outside the scope of your substance use. It might be a longing for renewed confidence and purpose, overcoming depression, finding a solution for panic attacks, building and securing more

fulfilling relationships, making a career change, solving legal problems, or any number of other desired changes.

We make these assumptions as a starting point. You are reading the material, so it is a safe bet that you already have some desire for change. But, if these assumptions do not apply to you, you probably are doing this program due to coercion by family members, an employer or maybe even the court/legal system. If that is the case, we hope you will work through the program anyway for the following reasons.

At some point in the future you, like most people, are likely to be faced with a life-changing decision. This program is a proven method for initiating self-change and is helpful when confronted with many of life's inherent challenges. There is no downside to learning this program because it will help you make changes in your life that you, personally, choose for yourself.

On the question of whether or not you “have a problem,” one of our main goals is to help you to simplify the issue. Let us be clear in saying that there is no number of drinks, drinking days per week, particular set of substance related life problems, or particular style of use that we or anyone, besides you, can point to as a standard by which to judge whether or not you “have a problem.”

This point is extremely important: a problem is defined as an obstacle between what you have now and what you want. “You” is the key term in that definition. Problems do not exist outside the realm of human wants. For example, if no one lived in New York City and floods washed over the entire area, there would be no problem to speak of because no one's wants were frustrated in any way. But as soon as people enter the equation, the floodwaters prove to be a huge obstacle to them obtaining their wants; they want to travel freely, to be relatively free of danger, and to be able to attain their desires, and thus a “problem” exists.

Whether you were coerced to come here or not, you can be assured that we will not be a part of any further coercion. In fact, our goal is much the opposite; it is to encourage free critical thought, self-directed change, and personal choice. You get to judge whether your drinking and/or drug use has been a problem for you, and the way you decide this for yourself is actually quite straightforward. You can ask yourself a few simple questions. Is your substance use an obstacle that is getting in the way of your wants? Are you willing to accept the costs and difficulties that have accompanied using these substances? By answering these questions for yourself, you can make a decision about your future behavior that makes you most comfortable. What's more, this line of thinking will allow you to see the situation clearly; you can be focused on making the choices that bring you the

greatest happiness, rather than battling the boogeyman known as “addiction.” You might change your wants, you might change the costs you're willing to pay, or you might change your actions. All can be solutions.

Cognitive Behavioral Education® does not tell you what to think or how to think, but provides a format to create positive self-determination. While one person may end up here as a result of pressure from their loved ones, employers or the legal system, most read the program content voluntarily, with no exterior motivators pushing them. Regardless of their reason, anyone who puts forth the effort to complete program is guaranteed to gain insights into themselves and their lives and can find success if they remain open to the idea that self-directed change is possible.

## How does the St. Jude Program® Define “Success”?

You may already know that St. Jude Retreats® conducts follow-up independent surveys to measure post-program abstinence from drugs and alcohol. These studies have been conducted from the population of former guests who completed the St. Jude Program® at one of the three St. Jude Retreats®. This independently verified, statistical, post-program, long-term rate of abstinence from drugs and alcohol (62%) is published for the world to see, and it is the highest post-program abstinence rate in alcohol and drug research based on independent studies.

However, while this abstinence rate is higher than that of any other program, this particular definition of program success is limited in what it tells us about the program's varied and long-term benefits. A 62% abstinence rate from drugs and alcohol use tells us very little about individual post-program behaviors and achievements, and tells little about what you, personally, might experience as your definition of success after you complete this program.

For instance, are those who stopped getting high and/or drunk more successful in their relationships, careers, and personal lives when they return home? Are those who complete the St. Jude Program® happier and more fulfilled in their new lives? Or just as important, are those who are not abstaining (the other 38%) in better mental and emotional condition than they were prior to completing the St. Jude Program®? How many of these folks have learned to moderate and control their usage? And, do some of those who still drink and use drugs see themselves as more successful and/or happier than they were prior to attending the program?

Based on these and other research questions regarding success, we decided to ask those who completed the St.

Jude Program® what their definition of being successful is. These question and answer interviews were quite illuminating and would forever broaden the understanding of the program's effectiveness and what our guests are seeking from St. Jude's social/educational process.

How does anyone know if they are successful? The simple answer is, only you know if you are successful, because being successful means different things to different people. However, when interviewing our past guests about their successes and failures some patterns emerged that helped us to create more effective methods for future guests, including you.

During the interviews, the responses of those who completed the program and who felt that they were successful were in stark contrast to those who felt that they were not. And not everyone who described themselves as successful was abstinent. So something other than simple abstinence from drugs and alcohol was at play.

Most former guests who identified themselves as successful generally defined success as gaining control and personal power in their lives. That was the overall theme on what constituted their success; greater control over habits, actions, goals and spheres of influence. Those who reported success also talked at length about gaining a larger worldview as critical to finding inner peace and renewed energy. They reported that their perceptions of their personal lifestyle options were broadened as a result of the program.

They also discussed emotional, material, career, and relationship improvements, as well as shedding the alcoholic/addict identity. When reporting on their success, they said things like: "After the program I graduated from college;" "I got back together with my husband;" "I found a new job, and I am much happier;" "I had a glass of wine at my daughter's wedding and realized I have total control;" etc.

At the core of their descriptions of success was the fundamental idea that they had power over their decisions and choices. Many of their comments about drugs and/or alcohol were geared toward discovering power and freedom from guilt. In other words, in one typical discussion the graduate said, "Oh, yeah, I stopped getting high..." another said, "Yeah, I have moderated..." followed by a longer, more descriptive explanation of setting and attaining other life-changing goals and controlling his new positive lifestyle. More often than not, the lifestyle portion of these discussions

was much longer, while the drinking and drugging, or lack thereof, was covered in a few minutes.

And for those who had been exposed to the idea that they were powerless over substances, a myth taught as fact within the recovery society; (i.e. support groups, treatment programs, the media, the disease concept and 12-step programs) the idea of gaining power over alcohol and drugs was revolutionary. Their descriptions of success nearly always included a massive shift from being hopeless to being hopeful in regards to changing their substance use habits. They came to understand that they had never lost their innate human power of choice. This realization provided them with confidence to make definitive changes from their previous heavy usage, or to abstain, whichever they chose to do.

Not surprisingly, these folks discussed their power over alcohol and drugs in more detail than those who had no treatment background. That would stand to reason, as those who were taught that they were powerless over alcohol and drugs had to abandon their previously learned powerlessness before they could experience their new, much brighter, hopeful and powerful existence.

Their descriptions of what happened to them after they returned home included other lifestyle changes, such as positive career and relationship changes that were typically reported by all

who completed the St. Jude Program®.

The overall theme of these discussions was that each individual defined their success by their ability to control themselves and to a certain extent their environments and circumstances. This was in addition to their ability to react productively to misfortunes that were out of their immediate control. All of these aspects of success were parallel to the traditionally held views of increased maturity and adaptive thinking skills.

Upon recognizing and asserting their personal control, they no longer thought of themselves as victims of their environment and were able to overcome what had previously been accepted as obstacles to their success. In essence, success was defined by proactive internal emotional and mental control over their environment, thus fostering increased confidence and internal resilience to negative outside factors that are a natural part of living.

Understanding and taking full responsibility for all of your choices is fundamental to the definition of success within the St. Jude Program®. The only way to escape responsibility for one's choices would be to ignore the information presented in the St. Jude Program®, which

“*...former guests who identified themselves as successful generally defined success as gaining control and personal power in their lives.*”

is specifically designed to empower people to take responsibility for their lives.

Because some of our guests and their families believe that a program, any program, can change a person's free will, little thought is given that, in reality, no program has the power to control free will. All power to choose resides within each person, intrinsically and individually. Each person is responsible for their own behavior. This is true before guests enter the program and it remains true after they complete it.

The great delusion of the recovery society is that some outside force stops people from using substances. In reality, if a person stays abstinent after attending a rehab, it's because they have chosen to believe that they can be happier without substance use. If they attend a methadone clinic daily, and stay free of other intoxicating substances, then they have chosen to believe that lifestyle is more rewarding than using heroin; they could just as easily choose to go get heroin rather than methadone!

If they choose to spend every free moment involved in "recovery" activities like daily 12 step meetings and the like, rather than using substances, it is because they have chosen to view those activities as more rewarding

than substance use. In all of these cases, the former substance user simply changes their perspective on what is their best option and makes new choices according to that perspective.

People, who have overdosed on drugs while taking a blocker against using their drug of choice, or taking a replacement drug, or those who simply decide to stop taking Antabuse so that they can comfortably drink, will tell you, "treatment" doesn't stop anyone from using. In the case of the various pharmacological treatments currently available, these treatments simply alter incentives by removing the ability to get a high so that users will conclude that using the particular blocked substance is a futile choice to make. By contrast, the SJP simply shows people that they are in control and always have been. The program also provides a method for discovering other satisfying life options from which to choose.

You have the power to be successful and to define your success any way you want. The most important question for you to answer now is: do you think you are worth being happier? We certainly think so, and we look forward to helping you to attain your dreams and build a joyous life!

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## CHAPTER 2

# Causes vs. Reasons

*“Our passions are the winds that propel our vessel. Our reason is the pilot that steers her. Without winds the vessel would not move and without a pilot she would be lost.”*

– Proverb

Addiction treatment proponents endorse a no-fault powerlessness narrative. They say such things as, “John needs to understand the underlying CAUSES for his drug use,” “We treat the underlying emotional issues that CAUSE addiction,” or “You need to develop new ways of coping with the stressful situations that trigger your relapse.” This theory, presented as fact, (i.e. life stresses cause consistent or increased drug and alcohol use) is presented so convincingly by talking heads on television, in songs, novels, movies, on the internet and elsewhere that it is truly a cultural phenomenon. The recovery society connects stress and substance use, and this connection has been forged so robustly it has become nearly inescapable.

### **Causes vs. Reasons: “Underlying Causes for Addiction” is a Myth**

The following concept is vital for you to understand if you wish to gain greater levels of satisfaction in your life. A cause is finite and completely predictable; it doesn't require any reasoning. Again, it is crucial to understand this fact: *a cause is finite and completely predictable; it doesn't require any reasoning.* For example, quietly walk up behind someone and clap your hands loudly behind their head. The person will blink involuntarily. This response is hard-wired in the nervous system from birth. The blink is a reflex caused by the loud noise.

The person did not think, “I should blink now.” The thinking part of the response is literally missing; the part called reasoning. Reasoning is thinking about your wants and/or needs and then deciding that blinking is an appropriate action to take in response to the clap. In this case reasoning does not take place in the process between the loud noise and the blink.

Most responses set up by fight or flight circumstances are reflexive actions. In other words, the blinking reaction is specifically caused by the loud noise - there was no thought involved. Should a mugger jump out unexpectedly and strike you in the face, no conscious (i.e. cognitive) process is going to occur between the strike and your hands involuntarily coming up to cover your face - it is automatic. Such responses have a direct causal relationship. They are caused by reflexive responses that are hard-wired in the brain.

The recovery society (including but not limited to treatment programs, 12-step programs and addiction counseling) would like you to believe that your behaviors (choices) with which they don't agree and label as “addictive behaviors” are reflexive. That is, “addictive” behaviors are conducted with no thought (i.e. no choice or reasoning). Your “addiction” in this skewed view is literally caused by stress or trauma. Yet a cause for a behavior such as heavy substance use needs thought to occur because heavy substance use is not a simple involuntary reflex like blinking - it's a complex behavior that takes several steps to complete. The recovery society would like you

to believe that your habits are involuntary, out of your control, and “caused” by external factors - rather than reasoned out in an attempt to satisfy personal desires. When you compare and contrast the choice to go to a crack house against that of an automatic fear response such as those described above, the recovery society view can be seen for the absurdity that it is.

No one could really believe that going to the liquor store, buying booze, drinking all night, becoming intoxicated, and having a domestic disturbance with your spouse are on the same level as blinking from a loud noise. Yet that is exactly what the recovery society is asking you to believe. “You are powerless over heroin.” This then expands to, “You cannot deal with stress well, so you need to develop a support system to help you resist binging when things get bad.” In this fallacious logic, stress causes drinking, and support is needed to fight the causative power of stress.

This “underlying cause for addiction” theory leaves out three inherent human characteristics: free will, choice, and reasoning. It makes you an involuntary helpless victim of your surroundings and circumstances. In this view, stressful circumstances cause you to use, and supportive circumstances cause you to stop; all the while your personal enjoyment of substance use is ignored as a reason for use. This renders you a perpetual victim of circumstance. But ask yourself; are you *truly* an involuntary mess? Do you really believe there is no reasoning behind your choices to get drunk, high or any other behavior that you freely choose? And if you believe you are powerless, do you really want to hang onto the beliefs told to you by a “professional” who cannot possibly know what your thoughts and reasons are for your behaviors? Worse yet is that both professional counselors and lay counselors, even if they claim to understand your thoughts and reasoning, are trained to convince you that your thoughts and reasons are flawed. Think about it; are you willing to be led by someone whose training is based on controlling you through coercion, moralistic judgments, guilt tactics and fear-based advice?

## Why Do You Use? What is the Reason?

By saying that stress, negative life circumstances, and other “underlying issues” don’t cause substance use, we don’t mean to suggest that outside factors have no bearing whatsoever on behavior; they certainly do. People consider plenty of outside factors when they choose their thoughts and behaviors, but these become reasons for their choices, not the causes of their choices. To restate this important fact: outside factors are reasons for, rather than causes of, your choices.

Now that you know that a cause for a reflexive action is an involuntary process, you can see that your choice to use substances, like any other choice in life, is NOT involuntary. As a matter of fact you now know that each and every choice you make is based on thought and reasoning. Thus, stress cannot cause drinking like a reflex; but life’s stress can certainly be a reason to drink, if that is the excuse or reason you choose to use. Consider the fact that people reason their way from stress to using. There is actually much thought between the two events. Take a look:

A naturally occurring stressful event occurs. John thinks, ‘God I hate my job.’ John then begins to reason using freewill and cognitive thought. He thinks, ‘Man, I would like to get high to make this job easier, so I think I will go in the bathroom and shoot up.’ This internal dialogue is, of course, motivated by John’s desire for greater happiness, which is the basis for all reasoning. And finally, in this particular case, John reasons that using will bring him greater happiness than not using. Once high, he thinks, ‘I am happier now.’

In summary, there are infinite reasons for the choices people make. But underneath the details of all of them is a constant. That constant is a perfectly consistent desire for greater happiness and life satisfaction. The Freedom Model® states, “All humans always move in the direction of what they believe will make them happy at any given point in time.” Whatever the situation and circumstances you find yourself in, you have always been in control, and you have always used your freewill to search for happiness. So the question is this: has your search been fruitful, or has it come up short?

In our Cognitive Behavioral Education® exercises it is understood that there are no causes for substance use, but rather, reasons through freewill, choice, and desire for happiness that motivate your choices. It really is that simple.

## Belief Is Not Fact

Beliefs can be incredibly powerful in ways you’d never expect. In one study, asthmatic patients were asked to inhale a mist that contained the very allergens known to cause their asthma attacks. Most of the patients experienced full-blown asthmatic reactions. The patients expected that result and it occurred. So what’s the problem? In reality the test subjects actually inhaled a harmless saline mist which contained no allergens whatsoever. The test subjects had asthma attacks because they believed they would, and the attacks stopped when the test subjects breathed from another inhaler that they were told contained a highly potent anti-allergenic

medicine. This time the claimed highly potent anti-allergenic medicine was the same harmless saline mist that had brought on the attacks! In both cases, their belief in a powerful external cause ruled their symptoms, even when they weren't really exposed to this cause. This is called "the placebo effect." It is very powerful and is well documented. (Kirsch, 1999)

How do you know that what you've learned from the recovery society about the causes of substance use and the effects of drugs and alcohol are true? Consider for a moment that maybe, they're not true. Are those beliefs worth challenging? Have your expectations been manipulated like the asthmatics in the example above? When you modify or see through a belief, your entire world changes.

More than twenty years ago we at Baldwin Research decided that these beliefs needed closer examination. It became obvious to us after many years of direct experience and research that the conventional wisdom about "addiction" is misleading at best and, at worst, is outright fraudulent. Furthermore, this conventional wisdom leaves people with a set of self-limiting and culturally learned beliefs. The stress/substance use connection is only one aspect of a much larger self-limiting belief system that we want to help you overcome. The question is, are you ready to step out of the recovery society and back into a place where common sense and personal power prevail?

To help you in this process of unchaining yourself from the self-destructive recovery society beliefs, we're going to describe these beliefs in some detail and then present the documented research information that calls them into question.

#### **Questionable Belief #1:**

***You can't solve a substance use problem on your own. You need lifelong treatment and/or support group involvement to stay sober/drug free.***

This belief is widely promoted but is easily disproven. Reliable wide-scale studies have routinely shown that the vast majority of people with substance use problems inevitably change their habits for the better *without ever seeking formal help*.

In their landmark study, the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC), researchers discovered, based on a nationwide

representative sample of more than 43,000 U.S. adults, that of those that had earlier been diagnosed as "alcoholic," only 25% still fit the criteria for alcohol dependence. Of the remaining 75% just 18% completely abstained from alcohol use, with the remaining using alcohol on some level but not to the level as to be classified as dependent. What was even more telling was that the vast majority of the "alcoholics" in this study, 75% had received no special help or treatment. (Grant & Dawson, 2006)

Furthermore, other studies have reported that, at any given time, about 75% of "recovered" people did not receive any formal help or treatment. In one such study, of the remaining 25% who did receive help at some point, not all of them got the kind of treatment/support regimen that people are told is necessary (i.e. specialty addiction treatment followed up with lifelong 12-step involvement.) (Dawson, et.al., 2005; Dawson, 1996; Sobell, et.al. 1996)

Here's the bottom line: for every successful person who stays stuck in the recovery culture, there are at the very least three more people who struggle with equal or worse substance use habits, who successfully overcome them and move on with their lives *without any treatment whatsoever*. And they do this not as fragile "recovering addicts" in need of constant support, but rather as individuals living a lifestyle whose futures are not defined by their past problems.

## **Substance Induced Behavioral Change**

Today's society is impressed with the pharmacological power of drugs and alcohol. It's common to believe that substances do everything from giving people courage, impairing motor skills, and increasing artistic ability, to causing violent behaviors, rape and infidelity. There are even hysterical primetime shows like the newest version of this narrative, "*Drugs Made Me Do It*" that continue to mislead the public with this erroneous belief. Substances supposedly do all of this damage as a function of their chemical action on the brain. But is this cultural faith in the chemical power of intoxicating substances undeserved? Perhaps, it is.

Let's go back to our placebo example again. It wasn't the presence of allergens that triggered the asthmatic reactions; it was the belief that what came out of the inhaler would indeed cause an asthmatic reaction. Could beliefs be at play with respect to the effects of intoxicating

“

*Problems in life do not directly cause substance abuse.*

”

substances? You bet. In fact, there are numerous placebo studies involving alcohol and drugs. In one such study test subjects completed a psychomotor test, and then they were asked to predict how much slower they would perform on the same test after drinking alcohol. Each subject was given drinks that contained either real or fake (placebo) alcohol and asked to complete the test again. Regardless whether they drank the real alcohol or a placebo, each subject's performance on the test was slowed down to the exact degree the individual predicted it would be! The same test was run with caffeine which, as a stimulant, people commonly believe will increase their performance. The results were essentially the same; the more they believed that caffeine would improve their performance, the more their performance improved regardless of whether or not they drank real caffeine. (Kirsch, 1999)

This certainly does not mean to imply that these drugs don't have some real chemical effect on the body. Of course they do; but it leads to the question of whether the chemical effect may actually pale in comparison to the influence of expectations/beliefs. In other words, in large part, each person to some extent decides what the effect will be when they ingest a substance. Consider the following:

*"Sometimes alcohol may be a relaxant (the martini after the hard day at the office) and sometimes it may act as a stimulant (the first drink at the party)." (Zinberg, 1986)*

The effects of substances can be whatever you want them to be. Some of the most compelling information demonstrating this fact comes from studying other populations around the world. This helps people to get a more accurate understanding as to what extent drinking and drug using behaviors are based on cultural norms and diverse belief systems. Over the past two decades Baldwin Research made it a priority to study how drinking and drug using habits and societal norms differ around the world. It has been found repeatedly and often that people's behavior upon drinking or drugging is exactly what they expect it to be, and what is expected of them in their culture (or acceptable), for better or for worse.

### **Questionable Belief #2:**

#### **Substances Cause People to Lose Control of How Much They Use**

Diverse cultural beliefs about substances are associated with drastically differing styles and levels of substance use. For example, there are isolated subcultures in the U.S.

in which almost all inhabitants share the same religion. Often these religions teach that drinking is a sin, that it's to be avoided completely, and that any use of alcohol will plunge the user into the dark side where alcohol takes over and they lose all control of themselves. (Houghton & Roche, 2001) These people live their entire lives without seeing anyone drink moderate amounts of alcohol, and there are no situations where drinking is acceptable in their culture. To some degree, their banishment and demonization of alcohol achieves their goal because there are very few drinkers. However, those who do drink tend to do it to the extreme. This behavior leads to typically severe problems and the drinker gets into serious trouble. These people see alcohol use as an all or nothing proposition. They have no concept of an in-between or moderate level of use; it's either abstinence or uncontrolled drunkenness. The drinkers appear to "lose control" when they consume even small amounts of alcohol, but this is likely because they learned from their culture to believe that alcohol is that powerful and that the choice to drink can end no other way. While they like drinking more than they like abstinence, they also have an unfortunate set of beliefs that allows for the possibility of only one extremely problematic style of drinking.

The bottom line is that people who believe they will lose control of their drinking or drugging appear to lose control, while those who are free of such self-destructive beliefs are far less likely to develop problematic patterns of substance use or to ever feel "out of control" of their substance use. In fact, this seems to be true in the recovery society as well. In our 23 years, we've heard thousands of detailed stories from people who left treatment programs feeling more hopeless and helpless than before they attended, only to end up using substances at more extreme levels than they did before they sought "help." As the belief that stress and personal trauma are triggers for heavy substance use took hold in their minds, their problems escalated. Not surprisingly, it has been shown through research that those who are taught these beliefs are more likely to "binge drink" than those who are taught that they are always in control of their choice to drink (nine times more likely, to be exact). (Brandsma, 1980)

In another study, researchers were able to predict who would "relapse" by testing how strongly they held to disease beliefs. They found that the stronger the subjects' beliefs in the disease/powerlessness/loss-of-control views, the more likely the subjects were to "relapse." (Miller, et al., 1996) Another important study showed that when heavy drinkers unknowingly drink alcohol, they are not triggered to drink more and more alcohol. It's only when they are told that what they are drinking contains alcohol that they excessively drink (whether or not it really did contain alcohol). (Marlatt, et al., 1973) People

don't lose control of their substance use because of the chemical properties of a given drug; they simply choose to use more so that they can get the predicted effect. And, the belief in loss of control or the power of drugs to "hijack freewill" actually supports and encourages loss of control behavior while leaving the chooser puzzled as to why they're engaging in behavior that has become counterproductive. The truism that what you believe you become is demonstrated.

We would be remiss not to mention our own study in this discussion. For 23 years, the defining feature of our program has been to present that substance use is a choice in which people are in full control of at all times, and that they can change their habits whenever they want. We have followed up with our former guests for just as long, and the 62% long-term abstinence rate of our non-treatment approach is much higher than treatment programs which teach the disease theory, powerlessness and out-of-control behaviors. And unlike treatment programs, we have many happy program graduates who use moderately. They have used the St. Jude Program® to extract themselves from the damaging recovery culture that some had become emotionally dependent upon. After attending one of the St. Jude Retreats®, these people stopped going to recovery meetings and thus stopped reinforcing the false beliefs that they are powerless and out of control, that substances have more power than they have, and that stress or life traumas directly caused them to relapse. With a renewed belief in their personal power to change, they finally outgrew their problematic behaviors and were able to deal with life-stressors without drug and alcohol use being attached.

**Questionable Belief #3:  
Substances Unleash Inhibitions and Cause People to Lose Control of Behavior**

As mentioned earlier, it is often said that different substances have various effects, such as causing violent behavior or excessive sexual behavior. But again, when we look at cultures outside of the recovery society, we see that it's not necessarily the chemical properties of a substance that cause such behaviors. More likely, people have learned that a certain type of behavior is to be expected when under the influence, and they live up to their cultural belief. (Edgerton & MacAndrew, 2003)

The most compelling argument against alcohol as a disinhibitor is what's called the "within limits clause." (Edgerton & MacAndrew, 2003) The "within limits clause" is seen again and again that in societies in which it is believed that alcohol causes people to lose control

of their behavior, this supposed loss of control tends to occur within clearly set boundaries. For example, in one particular culture in the Far East it is believed that alcohol causes people to become sexually uninhibited, and when they drink they regularly have sex with nearly anyone, regardless of age or marital status. In this society what our culture would call "cheating" is fully accepted when drunk, because the cheaters are believed to be "out of control." However, not everything goes. They have a strict and complex code against incest that forbids sex with in-laws and blood relatives within nine generations on the father's side and four generations on the mother's side of the family. The penalty for violating the incest taboo is death. Nevertheless, these people have wild parties during which they drink until they're falling down and sleep with anyone (i.e. orgies), but manage to strictly adhere to the no-incest code. That is to say, while they may believe that wild sexual behavior is unleashed and out of control as a result of intoxication, they're still clearly choosing to exercise control in their choice of sexual partners while highly intoxicated. This phenomenon of believing oneself to be under the control of an intoxicant, while still choosing to adhere to social norms is what anthropologists MacAndrew and Edgerton dubbed the "within limits clause."

In some cultures no sexual exploits are expected when under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, and with no expectancy of such problems, they don't often arise. More often, substance use is blamed for violence. Examples abound in which the violence takes place within strict limits. Fierce armed tribesmen put down their weapons before fighting in some cultures, and in others, people become violent when drinking, but only against outsiders from other villages, or in some other cases, only against their own people. Each culture has its own limits to which people obediently adhere while breaking all other rules of proper decorum.

**Questionable Belief #4:  
Stress or Trauma Causes Substance Use**

This is a big one! The idea that negative life events, trauma, anxiety, and stressful situations directly cause substance use is perhaps the most insidious belief in the recovery society. Consider the following: "My Dad died, and I went off the rails;" "I was diagnosed with hepatitis and I simply fell apart and started shooting heroin again;" "I lost my job, and I hit the bottle hard after that;" "I was molested when I was five and this unresolved emotional pain causes me to drink;" and "I was raped last year and it was so incredibly horrible that I relapsed into heroin use for the last ten months."

Let us be clear here: no one argues that emotional pain and trauma exist or that it is not painful and in some cases seemingly unbearable. That does not change the fact that stress and/or trauma are universal facts of life that all people experience. What is essential to understand is that problems in life do not directly or indirectly cause substance use. The process of separating the recovery society's belief that connects stress and trauma with unavoidable substance use is a fundamental lesson of this program. People experience true personal freedom and joy when life's tragedies and the internal emotional strength to overcome them coexist. Perhaps it is time for you to assert your power and strength over life's unavoidable difficulties and not fall prey to a belief that is false.

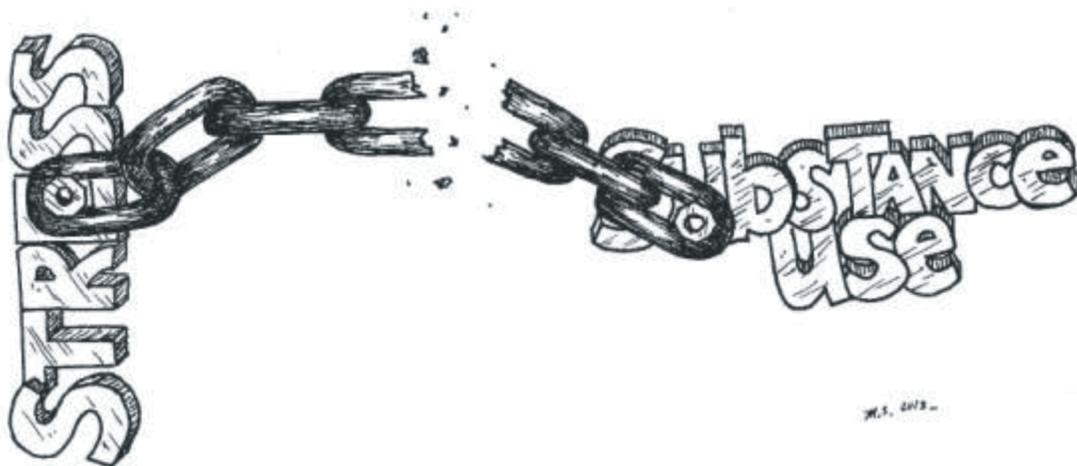
How many times have you said or heard similar statements as those quoted above? The unfortunate part is that people in the recovery society constantly reinforce this connection between stress or other serious problems and substance use. Because substance users believe it, they create this emotional connection. In essence, beliefs adhered to long enough and by enough of the population become a cultural norm; i.e. belief becomes the culture's reality, hence our current recovery society.

American culture, fueled by talk shows, a 24 hour per day media, and a money and power hungry treatment providers have cashed in on this recovery centered belief system. The good news is that learning that life traumas and stress don't cause substance use and realizing that you have power over your choices and the reasons for your choices is quite liberating. It opens the path to a life free of substance use problems. Unfortunately, life stressors will not go away after you complete this program. As a matter of fact, for some the stress level is quite high initially as they return home to rebuild their lives. However, by gaining this new understanding and perspective, you can avoid the self-fulfilling prophecy that, "Life is just too tough. I need to get high."

Think about this. Isn't stress normal? Isn't trauma in some cases unavoidable and randomly dished out? Don't good, honest people get cancer, get hit by cars, and lose loved ones to violence or disease? This being true, doesn't it make more sense to accept the truth that stress and trauma doesn't cause people to use substances, but rather, are reasons some might use to justify drinking or drugging? The fact is there are millions of people throughout the world that live with profound stress and horrific conditions, yet most don't use their troubles as reasons to get drunk or high.

In different times and places people have believed in different reasons for substance use, but scarcely has it been believed that substance use was directly caused by stressful life circumstances. On the contrary, cultures have expressed explicit reasons for actively and voluntarily choosing to use substances. For example, in our nation's early history, many drank alcohol like water as was the custom because safe drinking water was limited in their European homelands. Nevertheless, in that time, when some people drank in excess to their own detriment, all involved, including the drinker himself readily admitted that he simply loved the feeling of being drunk. (Levin, 1978)

Elsewhere, those considered "alcoholic" readily admitted that their reasons for drinking were "hedonistic and social," and sometimes to seek relief from exhaustion, but the habit was always seen as masculine and as a freely chosen purpose-driven behavior. (Singer, 1972) Otherwise, most drinking of alcohol in China was done routinely with meals, as in many other cultures. The point is that people have many reasons for drinking alcohol and using drugs, of which stress is just one. If you choose to believe that substance use is the proper response to stress, then that is how you will behave. Remember that substance use can be whatever you choose it to be.



The recovery society promotes that if a person experiences negative circumstances, which is a normal aspect of everyday life for all people, that person will be uncontrollably drawn into substance use, particularly if they have a history of making similar choices in the past. Culturally, then, personal choice is removed from the equation altogether.

The idea that people must be shielded from life stresses has become the mission of the treatment industry and 12-step programs as well as much of the therapy profession. Well intentioned or not, the coddling of substance users and promotion of a belief in stress-induced substance use have resulted in a tragically vicious cycle. First, life stressors are unavoidable. So the treatment objective of shielding an individual from the unavoidable becomes a sure bet that "relapse" will occur. Then, with each "relapse," the troubled person dives deeper into the perceived protection of treatment and 12-step meetings, where the connection that stress causes relapse is further reinforced. From there, the real world becomes a scary place full of dangerous triggers (think people, places and things), and the troubled person, whose life was once consumed by the pursuit of using substances, is now consumed by the pursuit of not using substances. In both scenarios the troubled person's life still revolves around substance use, but now without any enjoyment! Even with all of this neurotic energy spent on creating a safe stress-free, trigger-free existence, most of these people still go back to problematic substance use. This lifestyle of avoiding "triggers" might be acceptable to some, but for most, it doesn't prove to be a very fulfilling existence.

The good news is that there is an escape from this vicious cycle of misinformation. You do not have to accept the destructive and false belief that negative life circumstances cause "relapse." You are a powerful, strong being and hopefully you, and everyone around you, can start acting on this truth.

Because of the natural tendency to absorb the beliefs of the culture in which one lives, it can be difficult for individuals not to be influenced by the society surrounding them. But that is certainly not a reason to assume you must believe as others do; especially if the beliefs encourage a behavior (e.g. substance use) that hampers your ability to overcome inevitable life challenges.

So now we get down to the nitty-gritty; *are you willing to abandon the recovery society beliefs and separate normal aspects of life from your substance use habits?*

*Are you willing to become a more knowledgeable and empowered person? Are you willing to separate life challenges from the activity of drinking and drugging?*

Maybe you are a believer in the connection. Maybe you have spent time trying to convince yourself and your loved ones that you cannot "handle" stress and that you collapse into "relapse" at the slightest sign of struggle. Maybe you use the common belief, although entirely proven to be false, that your "addictive personality" makes you do things others don't do. Maybe you throw the "I have a disease" excuse at those who disagree with your behaviors and choices. Maybe you have gone to treatment that validates your belief that you are not responsible for your own drinking and drugging behaviors. Having treatment programs agree with the notion that your drinking and drug using are not your fault gives you ammunition against those who claim that you could stop drinking and drugging if you really wanted to. But maybe,

just maybe, if this describes you; you are now ready to learn that a whole different world exists that is filled with promise, personal power, and the natural ability to overcome your self-limiting belief system.

“ *Are you willing to abandon the recovery society beliefs and separate normal aspects of life from your substance use habits?* ”

Perhaps it is now time to stop making excuses for your counterproductive choice to use substances, redirect your life, and build a more thoughtful existence. If you embrace personal accountability for every decision in your life, you will be able to make responsible, productive choices in the face of any and all stress. You will be just like billions of people throughout the world who have come to know that personal responsibility is the pathway to personal growth and happiness. Think about that; billions do not connect substance use with stressful or traumatic events, so you can certainly follow their lead to greater confidence and positive self-change habits if that is what you want.

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## CHAPTER 3

## What is Cognitive Behavioral Education?

*“People with a high level of personal mastery are able to consistently realize the results that matter most deeply to them—in effect; they approach their life as an artist would approach a work of art. They do that by becoming committed to their own lifelong learning.”*

— Peter Senge, Director of the Center for Organizational Learning at the MIT Sloan School of Management

Cognitive Behavioral Education (CBE) is defined by a very specific method of nonjudgmental presentation techniques. The CBE presentation method is coupled with this curriculum which is founded upon the Freedom Model Law of Universal Motivation. The Freedom Model Law of Universal Motivation holds that each individual's behavior is freely chosen, for themselves, *by themselves*, as a means to achieve happiness within themselves. Specifically then, no one is ever “out of control,” or doing anything that they don't want to do. Everyone does what they personally think is their best option for happiness at any given time. Thus, CBE® presenters do not coerce or control our guests into *doing what we think they should do*, as this is futile and does not lead to lasting or meaningful change. While an individual may attempt to do what others want them to do, they only do what they think will bring them the most happiness. Sometimes, of course, they may temporarily think that following someone else's wants is their best option for happiness, but more times than not, they *do what they want to do*.

While this may sound like wordplay, we promise you it is not. We know that you are already doing what you want to do and that you will continue to do what you want to do. Our approach is designed to provide a method for you to expand your range of options or potential wants, clear out any thinking that clouds the subject, and honestly judge the utility or futility of your substance use choices (or other choices or behaviors that might have limited positive returns.) You can then deliberately make the

choices that bring you the most happiness. In contrast, the recovery society has already decided that you should not use substances. They've labeled your behavior as either “dysfunctional” or “irrational,” and have already decided what you should do: that is *conform to their conception of what your behavior “should” be*.

If you've spent several years going back and forth with problematic substance use, then the problem may be that you're trying to conform to other people's wants or standards of proper behavior. It's time to ask yourself honestly, what do you want? Do you think it is possible that you can get more happiness from different choices and activities? When you can clearly answer these questions without the cloud of guilt in the way, then changing your habits and behaviors can be rapid. Also, because the CBE discipline does not allow the presenter to judge you or your choices and behaviors, there is no need to tell the presenter what you think they want to hear. There is no need for these types of useless mind games. We accept who you are and will make no attempts to coerce you in any direction.

The recovery society may seek to induce a desire to stop negative consequences of substance use through guilt-laden interventions and attempts to make people “hit rock bottom” through “tough love.” Rarely does the recovery society offer people the opportunity to freely create, weigh, and pursue their own options; they just assume that they, the recovery professionals, know what's best for you and that you should just do what they tell you to do.

CBE is dedicated to offering you the chance to openly exercise and follow your own judgment. We know that only you are capable of determining what will bring you the greatest level of happiness and that you'll guide yourself there if given the chance. This curriculum provides information on how people can think for themselves more effectively through the power of self-analysis and self-directed change. This is accomplished through an educational experience which includes you gaining an understanding of five distinct universal life axioms that exist for all individuals regardless of background, experience or culture.

CBE Presenters provide individuals information on possible ways to utilize these five axioms to their benefit through the use of this textbook and the accompanying workbook exercises. By presenting axioms that are naturally beneficial and culturally universal, our presenters do not have to pretend to know what specific choices are best for you because the axioms are principles that you can apply yourself to aid you in *any situation*. No one knows what is best for you, except you. You get to choose what is best; the program simply lays out a series of exercises that will naturally help you create your own options for positive self-change, assuming, of course, that is what you desire.

Because we assume that you have enrolled in the St. Jude Program in search of more satisfying options that have a more positive return on your investment, we will guide you through the process of self-analysis and positive self-change. In other words, you will learn how to analyze your choices and make more satisfying and fulfilling choices out of the infinite options at your disposal. That is the beauty of freewill: is it an infinite internal resource for you to utilize at any moment. The life you want to lead is yours to create!

We know that you always have made, and always will make, the choices that you believe will bring you the greatest happiness. So, instead of pressuring you into submitting to our judgments, we simply offer you a method by which you can expand your range of options and evaluate them all, making new judgments and thus new choices that are *deliberately formed to maximize both present and future levels of happiness*. You are, at this moment, the culmination of your lifetime of voluntary choices, each motivated by your pursuit for personal happiness and your judgment of what will bring you that happiness. For some, this has brought about limited results, with very little satisfaction gained for the resources and energy invested. We will show you how you can gain more happiness, more efficiently, and with far less risk of unhappiness resulting from the choices you make. This is the goal of all CBE exercises. CBE provides a method of self-analysis that serves as a self-

created guide to a more positive lifestyle, whatever you determine that lifestyle to be. CBE offers a path to self-discovery and self-creation. But CBE is not a learning experience that teaches or tells you what to think.

In Cognitive Behavioral Education the term “cognitive” refers to thoughts and beliefs, in this case, your thoughts and beliefs. Your thoughts and beliefs are completely independent of all other beings; they are yours and yours alone. Hence, the reason that all CBE presenters are trained that they are not in control of you, and the reason so many of our guests are completely relieved and comfortable when they have their first class. Most prepare themselves for the “bait and switch routine.” That is that even though many rehab programs and 12-step programs initially claim to be non-controlling, in point of fact these programs are actually based on coerced control and “brainwashing” techniques. But CBE® presenters understand what it means to be an individual, and we respect your natural autonomy. We know that the only thing that will cause you to change any behavior is your own belief that you have better options and your own choice to pursue those options.

Obviously a person's thoughts and beliefs are the root of their feelings, choices and ultimately their resultant behaviors. We repeat that below, because it's so important:

*Your thoughts and beliefs produce feelings, choices and ultimately all of your chosen behaviors.*

To make this point self-evident, we ask you to take a few minutes right now for the following CBE® exercise:

### **Try to do something, without thinking about doing it first.**

Try this now, and then write down any behaviors or actions you are able to make happen without thinking about them first.

Obviously, it cannot be done. All actions in life (including those habits that seem to be autopilot responses like those of active substance use) are choices you make. What makes one choice seem like you have no control or feel “automatic” compared with those that are obviously under your control is the speed at which the choices you make are processed in the brain. Further, these well-worn habits can be acted out in the subconscious rather than the conscious mind because they have been repeated so often and for so long; hence, they seem automatic. With repetition, any choice a person makes can seem automatic because the speed of any highly repeated thought is processed very efficiently by the brain. (We will be describing how this occurs when explaining

the science of neuroplasticity in some of the following chapters.) People literally teach their brains a priority list of behaviors. Regardless of this processing hierarchy, all of your actions must begin as a conscious thought but over time some become processed much faster than others as a result of repetition.

Again, try the exercise above if you think you are powerless over any of your behaviors. *This is important.* ALL behaviors are choice-based, and thus originally created in your mind. Behaviors start in the mind as thoughts and are then processed by the brain. Thoughts of getting high and drunk are processed no differently than thoughts of choosing to eat toast or going for a walk. In the case of habitual behaviors, those thoughts are processed at much higher speeds, but the action begins with the thought just the same.

The above exercise proves what should be obvious; that every single choice you have made in your lifetime has been created first with your thoughts, and then acted out by *you* through your behaviors. Obviously, this obliterates the disease and powerlessness theory of "addiction," which claims that you have no control. Every choice you made to use substances began with a thought you created to do so. Therefore, you cannot be powerless, as you have created, in your own mind, your current reality and lifestyle. The good news is that this fact is also true for your future; you get to decide what your life will look like from this point forward!

As we stated earlier, CBE does not allow us to judge your personal decisions as right, wrong, good, or bad. You

decide; this is non-treatment; this is non-therapy; this is non-control; this is education only. If you judge that your choices bring you the amount and quality of happiness you desire, then you may not wish to change anything. If not, then may want to explore, discover and create new options. You do not need to make your decision now. Perhaps you are unsure if you want to change or even how much you want to change in your life. As you proceed through the program, keep an open mind. We guarantee you will gain a new perspective and see a world of possibilities open up to you.

(Important note for those who are enrolled in the St. Jude Residential Program offered at one of our retreats: There is one aspect of the St. Jude Program that has an element of control and that is simply the safety of our guests at the retreats. Based on this reality, each of our guests is required to sign a contract that outlines conditions under which they can remain in the program. These rules of conduct and behavior are reasonable, responsible and

time tested. CBE and the curriculum are based on the Freedom Model, but the retreats, themselves, are our collective homes, and it is a privilege and not a right to be here.

This is the reason you were asked to sign a contract with each guest making those standards documented and fully understood. Our home is your home, but everyone has standards in their respective homes; the retreats are no different. So while our CBE teaching techniques are Freedom Model based and completely personal to you, the retreats do have rules set up for the safety of our guests as documented in the guest contract. This makes the experience for all guests a pleasurable and productive one.)

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*Your thoughts and beliefs produce feelings, choices and ultimately all of your chosen behaviors.*

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## CHAPTER 4

## Do You Want To Change?

*“The greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.”*

– William James, American Philosopher and Psychologist

“Once I start using, I lose all control.” Our presenters and staff hear this all the time. This “loss of control” theory has grown out of the recovery society’s beliefs and teachings. The reality is this: *no one is ever out of control*. If powerlessness actually existed with respect to drugs and alcohol then no one would ever stop; not even to enter rehab or attend a meeting. Of course, there are those rare cases of individuals with severe mental illnesses or brain damage who do exhibit legitimate lack of control over their behaviors. But this is an extremely small percentage of the population; approximately 1% according to the National Institute on Mental Health. With that said, the population that has historically completed one of the St. Jude Programs in the St. Jude Program Series is not a part of that population, nor do we attempt to address those in that population, as their problems are beyond the scope of this educational process.

As you now know from reading the first few chapters, there are numerous studies that show that people have full control over their behaviors when actively getting drunk and/or high. Whether you choose to believe it or not, it is true. A problem can develop when you choose to believe that alcohol and drugs have power over you and that you are powerless with respect to using them. In other words, whatever you believe about the elusive “power” of alcohol and drugs and their supposed increase in power as more is consumed *will become your reality*. What you think and expect becomes your reality. The title of this chapter is “do you want to change?” If you

answered yes, then the first myth that must be dispelled is that you are “out of control” of any of your personal behaviors. You have never been out of control. But if you believe that you lose control of your choices and behavior while using alcohol or drugs, then you have taken on the identity of the “addict” or “alcoholic.”

Just as the cultures that lie outside of the recovery society instill specific behavioral expectations about substance use, and those same people act out the expected cultural behaviors; you too, have learned from your culture a very specific way to view drinking and drugging. The recovery society has instilled in you the belief that there is a special class of people who lose control and that you may be one of those people. By creating a strong expectation of a personal loss of control over drinking and drugging choices, the associated labels of “addict” or “alcoholic” give you license to drink or drug with reckless abandon and ensure that you will genuinely feel “out of control” while doing it.

*The feeling of powerlessness is very real*; of that there is no doubt. Beliefs have the power to create very real experiences as manifested in the mind and the brain. An example of this phenomenon is a study in which people’s brains were scanned as they drank wine. The researchers gave the test subjects the same cheap wine in each case, but when researchers told the test subjects that it was expensive wine, the pleasure centers of their brains lit up more than in the subjects who were told that they were drinking cheap wine. So, *the expectation*

of better tasting wine led the subjects to **physically experience better tasting wine**. (Stanford, 2008) Thus, they wouldn't be lying when they said that the more expensive wine tasted better than the cheaper wine, even though there was no actual difference between the two. Likewise, a similar phenomenon happens when people expect to lose control over substance use; they truly experience a feeling of losing control. But just like the wine, it's only *the experience of feeling* out of control; it's not an actual loss of control. These effects are very real. Research has demonstrated that drinkers who reject the "loss of control" theory are much more likely to drink without problems after ending treatment than those who believe that "loss of control" actually exists. (Heather, 1982)

For those who believe in the loss of control or those who may be sitting on the fence, we must ask this question; if you aren't in control of consuming each drink or hit, *then who is?* If you're not the one putting the pipe or bottle to your lips, then who is? The truth is that as the drinks flow, the crack is smoked, the heroin needle plunges; you're simply doing what you want to do, and the "addict" label, with its implication of a loss of control has facilitated a series of choices to use more substances as well as a ready-made excuse to throw caution to the wind because you believe you have "lost control" of your own behavior. You might think "What's the use? I can't help it," as you continue to consume vast amounts of substances. But if you stop to think about it, this thought and belief system is a decision; a choice in and of itself!

“

*Success is tied to one common factor: fully embracing personal responsibility.*

”

## The Alternative to Loss of Control: Owning Your Choices

There are people who engage in high levels of substance use and would be considered to have a substance use problem by most people's standards, yet they don't ever have any inkling that they're out of control. Young substance users who haven't yet been confronted by people telling them that they should change and who haven't had any major experiences with the recovery society tend to own their choices. They don't see themselves as having a problem. They like what they do and haven't yet had to answer to anyone about it. They are, and feel like they are, in full control of their behavior. They own the fact that they like

the feeling provided by substances.

These same people have no trouble staying sober when the situation calls for it. For example, they don't feel the need to sneak a high where it's clearly inappropriate and would cause conflict. The recovery society mocks these people for their self-assurance. When a concerned friend or family member decides that the substance use is a problem, they confront the individual saying something like: "you've got a problem with drugs, you need help to stop." The user may retort "I can stop whenever I want to, I don't need help." It is at this point that the confronter may take on a mocking and sarcastic tone, belittling the user's sense of control (this is learned by living in our recovery society). The confronter uses the fact that the substance user hasn't already stopped doing something that the confronter disagrees with as evidence that the user is "out of control" and unable to stop. The confronter will usually tell the substance user how they are in denial of their problem or addiction. What the confronter fails to understand is that the substance

user only asserted their ability to stop, not their resolve or intent to stop, and these are two entirely different things.

If these self-confident substance users are left alone, they will usually modify their habits over time without any treatment at all. And furthermore, for those who are left alone, it is very rare for their stories to end tragically. However, many aren't left alone; many of these self-confident substance users are pestered into adhering to other people's standards of behavior. As they are threatened and subjected to coercion, guilt and shame about their use, they are faced with a dilemma: how to do what they currently believe will bring them the greatest amount of happiness (using substances), while simultaneously pleasing those people in their life that hold opposing ideals (abstinence). Since *loss of control* and the need for an outside force to change behavior has already been conveniently offered up by the confronters, it becomes the perfect excuse for the substance user to continue using. And for a time, because of the loss of control belief of everyone involved, natural consequences are typically lessened. The family and loved ones may actually begin the process of coddling the "sick" user by making excuses and mitigating consequences.

Now previously self-confident users portray every episode of substance use as a time of "loss of control" in order to defend their actions. Over time and with repetition, and

often as the result of a cat-and-mouse game of trying to conceal any instance of substance use from a confronter, the users fully internalize the concept of loss of control. They've said it so many times, and they've made every episode of use more extreme so that it's worth the cost of getting into trouble with their confronter. That "uncontrolled use" is now their new *modus operandi* and regretfully their newly acquired reality.

Don't get us wrong, it's not that these users always tell lies, which they then begin to believe. This is certainly true with some people, but there are others who fall into the trap of believing in *loss of control* out of simple error. When confronted about their substance use, these substance users capitulate to the erroneous notion of "loss of control" for the purpose of appeasing their confronters. As they try to abstain to appease those around them, they eventually decide to go back to substance use simply because they still view it as a great option for achieving personal happiness. After going back to using, these substance users let shame kick in and feel like failures. What they don't realize is that they only failed at continuing to live up to someone else's wants and standards while they succeeded at following their own wants and standards. As the result of not being true to themselves, these users end up puzzled and reinforce the idea that they must not be able to control themselves. What they should have learned is that while conformity is a powerful motivator, the more direct pursuit of personal happiness is a much more powerful motivator. *Unfortunately, they accepted the erroneous idea that their **own** behavior is beyond their **own** control!*

There are others who, upon being forced into defending their substance use habit, immediately feel the shame associated with realizing that their use is purely aimed at personal happiness. They fail to understand that they, like everyone else, always seek to maximize their own personal happiness. So they immediately grasp onto the "loss of control" concept to avoid being perceived as selfish by others or *themselves*. For these people, not knowing why they do what they do seems to be a more comfortable option in the short term than accepting the stigma of being "selfish."

The common denominator with all of these users who start out confident in their ability to control their use yet eventually come to see themselves as powerless and "out of control" is this: they refuse to proudly proclaim the obvious, that they use substances because they like the feeling. They run from this truth for various reasons, but it usually has to do with the troublesome practice of attempting to live by other people's standards rather than being true to themselves.

There is another category of users who feel powerless; those who were actively and aggressively taught to feel powerless over certain personal behaviors and emotions. Some were taught the powerless concept while attending rehabilitation programs, counseling and 12-step programs. Many are now being taught the mythology of the disease and powerlessness concepts in grade school programs across the country. Others grew up with immediate family members who were heavily involved in the recovery society by being a member of a 12-step group or employed by a rehab. These children heard all their lives that substances are powerful and that any use leads to excessive "uncontrolled" use. They may have been told by their parents or by the school programs that "you have the alcoholic gene" or that "you have an alcoholic mind" and that "you have more than a 50% chance of becoming an alcoholic." The result of growing up in "recovery-centered" families is typically a strong belief in powerlessness and the "loss of control" theory. This can bring about a variety of self-destructive behaviors.

Likewise, there are those who experience some substance related problems and honestly and naively go to those who are supposed to be the experts in solving these problems. They put their trust in these authority figures who then teach to feel powerless and to expect to be "triggered" into unwanted behaviors. These professionals teach the substance users to focus on anything and everything other than their personal choices and habits. The users are falsely taught that they are powerless, out of control, and helpless to change their habits.

Regardless of how one gets there, the state of feeling powerless and out of control is just that; a feeling, an experience based on belief, not an inherent reality. The great thing is that beliefs are learned, chosen, and developed; not innate from birth. You can challenge your beliefs, and realize that people do change their beliefs and behaviors all the time. Instead of ignoring the obvious, you can embrace and own the fact that you have chosen every instance of substance use throughout your life. And you have made these choices simply as a means to find personal happiness, which is a perfectly normal motivator. Knowing that you are moved by normal motivation, you can shed the "out of control" experience by rejecting the false belief that you are powerless. No longer feeling powerless and owning that you've always been pursuing personal happiness, you can freely and openly evaluate whether your style of substance use provides the greatest amount of happiness or whether there may be more effective options.

## Significant Thoughts

When speaking to a remorseful crack user after a three day expensive run, we hear the excuses repeated over and over: “I am driving home after I get my paycheck with no thoughts whatsoever about getting high. And then, just like that I get off the exit and find myself at the crack house and wonder how it happened. I feel powerless and totally out of control!” Several things of note are occurring in this statement. Let’s pull it apart.

First, users think they have no control. They say they went from no thought of getting high, to being at a crack house with a crack stem in their mouth. They claim that all the behaviors of driving to the crack house, finding parking, going into the crack house, negotiating and buying the crack, finding their spot and lighting up were accomplished with no thought whatsoever. Tragically and in many cases, this pattern repeats itself over and over with devastating effects. This same scene and description is played out by thousands everyday in today’s victim centered culture. Whether it is the twenty-year-old popping pills, the forty-year-old at the bar, the fifty-five-year-old mother of three at home drinking wine, or the executive who is secretly doing heroin, the descriptions of powerlessness are amazingly similar.

Users omit details because by including their thought processes, they would have to accept responsibility for their choices. *Remember, nothing can be done without thinking about it first.* You know this to be true from the CBE exercise you completed earlier in this program. That being an inescapable truth you can now identify the conscious decision that was made to get the crack. There was some conscious thought, no matter how small, no matter how fast, no matter how much this user wants to deny or ignore it, which amounted to “I want to get high. I want to smoke crack.” In the case given above, this thought was immediately followed by the next obvious choice needed to carry out the satisfaction of that want; the choice to turn the car onto the off-ramp and to continue on to the crack dealer’s house.

Once the decision was made to go to the crack house (which could take as little as a thousandth of a second to process), the subconscious takes over from that point forward, assuming of course that the travel path to the crack dealer is well-known. If it was not, then the story would be quite different. Searching for a crack house demands much more cognition, thought, and reasoning, and thus refutes any claim of not knowing how one got to the crack house. But that is not the case in this example. In this case, the user had a well-known and practiced routine for getting to the crack house, purchasing the crack, and getting high based on multiple trips to the crack house in the past. The process seemed automatic.

Any routine that has been well established can be carried out in the subconscious rather than conscious mind. One way subconscious processes are set apart from conscious processes of the brain is the number of times a particular thought is repeated into the long-term memory of the brain. When a thought is repeatedly recorded in long-term memory, it is then able to be recalled quite easily and efficiently. Specific activities repeated enough times are seemingly erased from memory or seemingly never occurred. To understand subconsciously performed routines and their effect on the brain, one might think about driving on a long highway for hours, and then realizing you have no memory of the last twenty miles. You were driving the car subconsciously, and no matter how hard you try, no memories of that portion of the highway will ever be able to be recalled. That is a subconscious event.

When a habit is well-entrenched, such as knowing the route to a certain drug dealer’s doorstep, very little conscious processing and very little long-term memory are needed to get there. Therefore, the route to the crack house seems “automatic.” So in that respect, the idea that going to the crack house seems “automatic” is, in fact, probably an accurate description of how the user feels when recounting the process. But what is omitted from these conversations of perceived powerlessness is *the responsibility for making the decision to smoke crack in the first place!* This point cannot be overstated. Regardless of how quickly the initiating thought to go to the drug dealer’s house is consciously made and then processed by the brain, it is still a conscious thought, and thus, able to be recalled. After discussing these situations with thousands of users over the last 24 years, no one ever stated, “I cannot remember deciding to get the crack.” However, many have stated that from that point forward, “it seemed out of my control. I don’t remember anything after that. Two days later, I was broke and seriously remorseful.”

The initial thought to get high (or drink alcohol) can always be recalled. This is simply because most thoughts that create change, in this case the change from going straight home from work to going to the crack house are automatically recorded in long-term memory and can be recalled. These are conscious decisions, and therefore we are responsible for the outcomes. While the subsequent subconscious thoughts and actions are not being recorded by long-term memory, it does not mean that the individual did not create them. All subconscious thoughts and actions that may be difficult to remember later on are *also the full responsibility of the individual.* For example, no matter how many times you might tell the officer that you were driving subconsciously on your long freeway trip and thus you are not responsible for your excessive speed, the

officer is still going to write you the ticket for your actions. Remember, the word *subconscious* still contains the word "conscious" for a reason. No one is totally oblivious to their own actions. If you find it important to be conscious of your actions in any subconscious moment, you can do so. An example of this would be if a deer suddenly jumps in front of your car.

Also worth noting is that most people don't have these experiences of supposed mindless "uncontrolled" substance use until they've been taught to see their behavior as a function of powerlessness. And, even though powerlessness is taught by the recovery society and broadly accepted, you can choose not to believe in powerlessness any longer or feel shame or guilt about substance use. You can choose to take responsibility for your choices and own the fact that you are freely choosing to pursue the sliver of happiness provided by substances, *but be willing to accept the consequences as well.*

The creation of a powerlessness script is a chosen emotional process that in the present example begins immediately after the car turns off the highway towards the crack house, although it's amplified by the earlier choice to believe in powerlessness. Once the routine of the crack run is initiated, the following steps occur that again make powerlessness seem even more convincing.

The individual omitted that he made the decision to throw caution to the wind and use crack (or any other substance) without limits. This is a very important point. You know that each crack use (or any habitual behavior) takes place under some sort of self-defined and culturally influenced limits. If the choice or resulting behavior is one you know that others will not agree with, and your limits are incompatible with theirs, then you make the choice to have no limits; *which is, in and of itself, a choice.* People decide to be reckless and to feel out of control so the behavior is no longer seen to be their fault, i.e. "It just happened!" or "Screw it, might as well get good and drunk now!" This guilt-based decision is just that; one more choice to justify the behavior you like. Once the choice is made to relinquish responsibility, people decide, based on past experience, how far they will take the temporary escape from responsible living. *These are all freely chosen self-limits you place on your behaviors.* In the case of crack and the more expensive drugs, this decision is usually based on economics. When the money runs out, substance use stops too. In the case of drinking (because it is legal and cheaper) the period of use may be longer in duration than that of other drugs.

A crack run or a drinking binge or any behavior similar in nature to these examples is filled with cognitive choices, thoughts, and carefully constructed planning to lessen the

negative effects on your lifestyle obligations, while also enjoying the effects of the drugs themselves. This is a massive attempt at having your cake and eating it too. The more repetitious these activities become, the more efficient people get at them. It's not any different than driving a car.

When you learn to drive a car much thought and effort go into the learning process. When drinking and drugging for the first few times this is true as well. As you get better at driving, you have less and less conscious decision-making associated with the activity. However, no one would claim, "I don't know how I got in the car, or how it drove me here. My God, the car just simply drove itself with me as a passenger." If you made this claim, people around you would question your sanity and tell you that you're being ridiculous. The only reason people get away with such statements made about their substance use is because those who do not use substances in this manner are appalled by it and struggle to understand why someone would give up so much to continue using. And when users say, "I don't know how I got into this mess again!" those around them accept that at face value as it is easier than seeing it for what it actually is, a series of repeated, practiced choices that the user decided to make.

So in the final analysis, any binge or substance use habit is based on practice, well thought out self-limits, consciously initiated thought, and subconscious habitual routines that *the recovery society mislabels as "powerlessness."* In the end, all people create their own reality, and no one is ever powerless over substance use.

## Foundations of Lasting Change

Our on-site research has shown, ultimately, that what seems to have predicted success for our guests has been one common factor. As we described in the earlier chapter, our successful former guests *fully embraced the message of personal responsibility.* They began to see themselves as personally capable of change and responsible for their future, and they set about maximizing their pursuit for personal happiness. Their positive changes had nothing to do with ongoing support group meetings, or being powerless, or believing that they needed to be shielded from the natural stressors that are a part of life. Rather, it was based on a cognitive shift toward owning their choice to use substances as a simple pursuit of immediate gratification based happiness, then embracing their own immense power of choice and finally, embracing the desire for long-term gratification over immediate short-term gratification. These were and continue to be the common denominators of success, and remain the underpinnings of the educational exercises throughout this program.

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## CHAPTER 5

# The Freedom Model Law of Universal Motivation

*“All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.”*

– Blaise Pascal, French mathematician and philosopher (1623 – 1662)

The Freedom Model Law of Universal Motivation (hereafter the Freedom Model®) states the following:

All people have the natural right, the ability, and the inherent tools to think freely and to exercise those thoughts through free will and free choice, from birth to death and that at any and every given instant in time a single drive motivates every human being: the pursuit of happiness.

It is vital to understand this fundamental and unchangeable law of human motivation if you are to learn how to effectively change your life for the better.

Free will allows for a complete range of what could make you happy and/or satisfied. You could select high-level satisfaction choices or low-level satisfaction choices. This gift, freewill, is a double-edged sword. Put another way, you can choose a self-limiting lifestyle or self-expansive lifestyle in your pursuit of happiness. This choice has always been yours. Like all people, your self-limiting and self-destructive habits are just ill-fated attempts to become happier people. Unfortunately, shortsighted happiness can result in disastrous and even fatal consequences. Free will allows for choosing poison over sustenance, hatred over love, jealousy over acceptance, all in the name of short-term gratification. Let's not forget that even destructive choices are chosen for a moment of satisfaction and that, too, is a form of happiness, albeit shortsighted and oftentimes hollow. Make no mistake; even those

choices that eventually bring painful consequences began with the initial motive that the choice would provide at least a moment of glory, happiness or some other kind of satisfaction.

This chapter provides a clear look into your motivation for greater happiness and how that undeniable, natural, driving force can bring much higher levels of long-term satisfaction and joy. The principles of total freedom of mind and the pursuit of happiness allow for each person to exploit the immense power of thought that exists within them and then choose a subsequent action. That power resides inside of you. That power can, of course, be used to overcome and/or regulate substance use. But that is just the beginning. You can also use it to build a profoundly more productive and happier quality of life by understanding how universal laws such as the Freedom Model and the Five Universal Axioms work. (The Five Universal Axioms will be discussed in detail in Chapters 7, 8 and 9.)

## Relative Happiness: It's in the Eye of the Beholder

To best understand what we are talking about, let's begin by discussing the idea of happiness, since the pursuit of it is the only cognitive motivator in the human condition. Happiness is a relative concept. A person who shoots heroin or drinks a case of beer each day may see this as

happiness while another individual may find happiness in changing careers or landing an airplane or... you get the point. The range of what brings happiness to each individual is completely personal and the options are infinite at any given moment. This is very important to understand because it forms the underpinnings of the power of personal responsibility.

According to the Freedom Model, all people are first and foremost driven by the basic human desire for happiness. Depending on what people choose to think and believe, and what options are available to them, people end up with more specific desires and behaviors; of which substance use is just one small possibility. Your will becomes whatever you choose it to be through your thoughts, and it is always focused on the end product of personal happiness. This is true, whether you realize and accept it or not.

## The Control Model

Sometimes the best way to understand a concept is by looking at its opposite as a means of comparison. Let us compare and contrast the Freedom Model Law of Universal motivation with a set of beliefs called the Control Model. In the Control Model perspective human behavior is essentially predetermined or controlled by genetic factors, brain chemistry, upbringing, conditioning, stress, triggers, etc. According to the Control Model individuals don't control their own behavior. Personal free choice or the basic desire for happiness isn't even considered as potential causes or reasons for behavior. It is important to note that there is no room for freewill if you want a compliant audience. In the case of addiction treatment we hear it all the time; "Why do addicts use drugs?" Treatment professionals answer: "Because they have a disease. Addicts can't stop, no matter how badly they want to stop." If this is true then human behavior is completely divorced from any sense of purpose; personal happiness isn't a factor and people are seen as mere animals that need to be tamed and trained to do what's good for them by those who know better. When Control Model theorists see behaviors that they don't approve of or are generally not accepted by society, they consider it to be evidence that the individual must be "out of control" and that they, the Control Model theorists, must step in to get them under control. If you shoot heroin or drink wine every night or smoke crack every weekend,

“Control Model programs or professionals seek to impose their standards of right and wrong behavior upon others, instead of allowing people to make their own choices.”

you must need a professional's help. The professional recovery society is run by the Control Model theory. This unfortunate situation has been slowly coming to a boil through the inevitable and mounting belief that one group (the "professionals") know what's best for the other group ("the addicts, alcoholics, depressed, the anxiety ridden, mentally ill, etc.)

We have searched far and wide and it seems that any substance use program that is not based on the Freedom Model is a Control Model program. Within the Control Model are various programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous™ and all its derivative programs, the Minnesota Model programs, methadone maintenance programs, doctor driven opiate replacement therapies, Antabuse therapy, various counseling and talk therapy models, etc. There are literally thousands of variations of the Control Model. Many derivations offer programs for behaviors other than substance use such as gambling, sex, phobias and the like. Control Model programs prescribe particular codes of behavior and consider any deviation from these codes of behavior to be evidence of sickness, powerlessness, and loss of control. Accordingly, control model professionals believe that a force outside the individual is needed to control the sick behavior. Often, the various helpers think it is their duty to step in and control the person whose behavior they deem unacceptable. These helpers may seek to control through actual physical force in extreme cases or, more routinely, they may use psychological manipulation.

However, and by whatever means they have at their disposal, all Control Model programs or professionals seek to impose their standards of right and wrong behavior upon others, instead of allowing people to make their own choices. Control Model programs are based on moralistic judgments of behavior, and their goal is to bring participants emotions and behaviors in line with what the professionals deem acceptable.

When it comes to substance use programs, Control Model methods are ineffective and sometimes counterproductive and worse than receiving no help. (Brandsma, 1980; Dawson, et.al. 2005; Robins, 1993) Substance use is a personal choice and, as such, can only be controlled by individuals themselves. The coercive tactics of Control Model programs unnecessarily complicates the natural process of positive self-change by disrupting personal freedom of choice. This, of course, does not mean that BRI researchers encourage self-destructive choices and

behaviors. We are certainly not blind to the ravages and inherent dangers of heavy substance use. But we also understand that it is not the role of CBE Presenters to be the parents, police, or the court system. There are institutions within our overall society in which the Control Model is necessary, the military and the legal system being two good examples. However, it is the role of CBE Presenters to provide information that allows for greater personal problem solving and to provide methods of self-change, none of which justifies controlling others.

How the recovery society historically grew away from free ideals such as personal power and natural autonomy is a story for another day. For now, we will settle on this brief explanation of the inappropriateness and ineffectiveness of the Control Model in the substance use field, because many of our guests have had so much exposure to these methods.

## The Freedom Model

Now let us revisit the life-enhancing Freedom Model Law of Universal Motivation. To fully understand the wonderful ramifications of true freedom, one must fully comprehend the following statement: all people always move in the direction of what they perceive will bring them the most happiness at every given moment of life. This statement is bold, absolute, and follows certain logic with which you may not initially agree. Because a person makes choices and behaves in a way that is seemingly destructive to outside observers, or does not follow someone else's code of ethics or morality, does not mean their choices and behaviors are not thought out and thoroughly intended to bring about some level of personal happiness. Their choices are their perceived path to happiness at that particular moment. This is true for all people worldwide, substance users and non-substance users. What one person may perceive and judge as downright awful may bring happiness to another; and who among us has the right to tell other people that their choices aren't worthy?

Removing personal judgment by others about good and bad, and right and wrong, allows for some strange and sometimes horrific behaviors to be seen for what they are; attempts to create happiness. For example, some culturally unaccepted behaviors that seem to be contrary to the Freedom Model Law of Universal Motivation are people who choose to self-mutilate, people who choose to use substances to excess, people who choose racist and hate-filled thoughts and behaviors, people who choose to murder and rape, people who choose to abuse children; the list is endless, as are all human behaviors and choices.

Again, it is vitally important to understand that the Freedom Model is not a philosophy that encourages moral anarchy or is seeking to create a lawless or a self-destructive society filled with abusive behaviors. The Freedom Model does not champion the self-determined destructive behaviors identified above, but simply uses these examples as extreme cases of when happiness to one may be difficult to understand by another. Yet, these negative behaviors are nonetheless happiness to those who choose such behaviors. The Freedom Model states the truth that personal happiness is subjective, dependent on freely chosen thoughts and beliefs. No one, no matter how hard you might try, you can't force a thought or belief into another person's mind; it is impossible. Therefore, trying to control or dictate what others choose to make them happy is a waste of time. The ability to attain happiness exists within each person completely independent from everyone else. This personal independence is best described by the word autonomous. We are all autonomous beings capable of creating our own options and paths to fulfillment.

To fully explain the ramifications of the Freedom Model, look at the darker side of what brings happiness to some. The self-mutilator is striving to feel, which may have been lost to the self-mutilator for a variety of reasons. In these cases, feeling anything is thought to be better than being emotionally shut off and numb. Relatively speaking, the "cutter" is finding a sliver of happiness in feeling again. This example is not the commonly held view of happiness and joy, but not all people fall into the largest part of the bell curve of accepted behavior. Many live on the edges where, for example, harsh racists may find moments of increased self confidence by demeaning others who they perceive as different. This sense of being above or better than others offers a perception of gratification (gratification is a form of happiness). The heroin user finds happiness in the temporary euphoric sensations of injecting heroin, just as the drinker finds happiness in the temporary euphoria created by ingesting alcohol. Other choices that are more generally accepted as bringing happiness, such as attending your child's graduation, getting married, or winning a championship basketball game, makes the theory that people are always motivated by happiness much easier to understand and accept.

We have spent some time explaining what the Freedom Model is. By this understanding, you can now better evaluate your choices in this nonjudgmental framework and ask simple, but powerful questions: "Am I as happy as I could be? Is it possible that my current choices bring me a lower level of happiness than they could? Am I willing to look into possibilities that may bring greater happiness in the long run?"

In regard to this program, the Freedom Model allows you to build a new life. You will evaluate your problems and your attributes, you will critique your lifestyle, and you will decide what truly makes you happy. In this process you are your judge and you are your teacher. The program will simply lay out ideas and methods for self-analysis that are designed to help you achieve greater happiness and fulfillment in your life. This is an important point, not to be missed: you already have what it takes to change; you do not lack willpower, and you are not out of control. Thus, we will not be providing you with any source of outside accountability.

The program gives you the tools and a forum in which to discover your best next moves. As you widen your range of happiness options and assess their value through a continuous cost/benefit analysis, you will quite naturally, without struggle, choose to move in the direction of what you believe will bring you the greatest amount of happiness; as you always have. But with renewed awareness of your options, you are likely to choose a completely new direction, one with much more profound and exciting returns.

Saint Jude Program presenters are not counselors, addictionologists, or therapists. They are trained Certified CBE Presenters who are here to help you with any and all questions you may have about the Saint Jude Program. They will not probe into your privacy, offer advice or claim that they understand exactly how you feel. The truth is no one can ever understand exactly how another feels. These Certified Program Presenters do, however, understand a fundamental principle: how you can change your life for better through the universal axioms, which will be discussed later in much more detail.

## Free to Live, But There is a Price

With all this talk about being free to behave how you want to behave, there is a caveat: *you cannot avoid the inevitable consequences of those decisions*. Remember that all decisions are made with the initial motive for happiness. However, the long-term consequences of your choices might end up being painful if the initial choice is not well thought out. With that said, your choices and their consequences need not be negative. We will show you how you can create positive outcomes to some fairly challenging problems and situations. What the results are after making a choice is really dependent, to a

certain extent, on the choice itself. An infinite number of options will bring about positive consequences, while an equal number of other choices will bring about negative results. It is just a matter of looking at the future with open eyes, making a solid analysis of the benefits versus the costs of decisions, and then moving forward. One thing is absolutely certain: if you choose to engage in costly behaviors with reckless abandon and turn a blind eye to what is going on around you (sticking your head in the sand), you will eventually experience a very dark set of circumstances. Lady luck is not so kind to those who choose to ignore foreboding situations looming on their horizon.

“ People always move in the direction of what they perceive will bring them the most happiness at every given moment. ”

Sometimes individuals make choices that result in deep guilt and remorse. At this early stage of the program, many guests are absorbed in these horrible emotions and memories. Please know that the program will address these emotional issues in great detail throughout the following chapters. It is important that you continue to push ahead. You will be able to tackle these difficulties and change those aspects of your life that got you into these messes in the first place. It is never too late to be happier and more fulfilled. Never!

## A Time to Change

The vast majority of people with substance use problems eventually change their habits. It is important to note that all of these self-changers, regardless of whether they've been exposed to the recovery society or not, chose to change, and then carried out that change in behavior by their own freewill and choice whether they realized it or not. They changed their behavior because they changed their thoughts and beliefs about their true limitless options.

You, too, can change, and you will the moment that you truly desire it. Control Model programs focus on outside sources of control and on the act of managing an imaginary lifelong disease. Yet somehow a few people exposed to treatment still manage to change, in spite of their learned Control Model counterproductive practices. This is because the internal motive and drive for happiness is so strong and so natural in these people, that even the influence of the entire Control Model recovery society could not snuff out what naturally motivates the thinking, feeling, driven human being. The St. Jude Program cuts to the chase with the Freedom Model Law of Universal Motivation and shows you how to directly address your

natural drive for happiness by expanding and evaluating and reevaluating your range of options. No longer do you have to sit and wait for life to change around you; now you can go out and make it happen on your terms! This program simply kicks starts what is already inside of you lying dormant, waiting for its reawakening, and waiting for direction from you.

If you've sincerely applied yourself to becoming a victim of circumstance because you were a complicit student of the recovery society, you might choose now to discard that belief system and take control of your thoughts, emotions, goals and dreams. The Freedom Model Law of Universal Motivation is there for you, waiting to be reawakened so you can become happier and more satisfied with each passing day. You were created with a hunger for deeper meaning and fulfillment. The questions are simple: Are you ready to choose options from an infinite universe that will provide greater returns? Are you willing to work towards fulfilling your dreams?

If you went to Control Model programs before and failed to change and are filled with doubt and fear, don't be discouraged. You didn't fail at making new choices; you

only failed at an impossible task, letting your thoughts be controlled by someone else. By understanding the Freedom Model, you will approach your problems in a new way, freely exercising your own judgment. Whatever decision you make, you will own it and follow it, leading to greater levels of personal happiness.

The following chapters will provide you with a comprehensive method of positive self-discovery. This program will demonstrate exactly how to build a more fulfilling way of life. Completing the following lessons will help you to begin rebuilding and changing your life so you may experience new levels of joy and peace. This is our promise to you. Progress now is unstoppable. Knowing the Freedom Model Law of Universal Motivation is one of the many keys to letting go of low return happiness habits. Why hang on to choices and behaviors that bring so little happiness when you now know you are built to achieve higher levels of it? Your search for happiness is naturally driving you. It always has. Let the Freedom Model Law of Universal Motivation drive you as never before; to much higher levels of joy!

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## CHAPTER 6

# The Mind/Brain Origination of Thought Debate

*“How would you feel if you had no fear? Feel like that. How would you behave toward other people if you realized their powerlessness to hurt you? Behave like that. How would you react to so-called misfortune if you saw its inability to bother you? React like that. How would you think toward yourself if you knew you were really all right? Think like that.”*

– Vernon Howard, American Author, spiritual leader and philosopher (1918 – 1992)

Before we get too far into this chapter, we want to make a very important clarification. This chapter may be misunderstood if it is not carefully and thoughtfully read. One could easily interpret this chapter as some sort of emotional presentation against the current treatment industry and/or recovery society. In fact it is not. That would be a huge waste of your time and ours. What this chapter is addressing is a very important single question:

## ***Do thoughts originate in the mind or do thoughts originate in the brain?***

If thoughts come from physical brain tissue that means that our thoughts are literally formed by biology, genetics, and without free will. If this is true, then the current addiction experts and recovery society are right; people are doomed to a difficult, uncontrollable chaotic existence. However, if thoughts come from the metaphysical (meaning beyond the physical) mind, then our internal power of free will reigns and people are entirely responsible for their personal successes and failures in life. This view allows for the absolute freedom of original thoughts and feelings that can create successes never before imagined.

So obviously, this mind vs. brain origination-of-thought debate is important to resolve before moving on to the rest of the CBE® program. If our brains create all thought, the following CBE® lessons, the Freedom Model® Law

of Universal Motivation and the Five Universal Axioms presented in this program will mean nothing and be of no consequence. But, if we can prove to you the reality that your thoughts and feelings actually originate within your mind (i.e. they are self-created by you) before the brain can process them, then the tools we provide in the following chapters will have an astoundingly positive effect on your life.

## **What is the Source of Behavior?**

Are you, the part of you that thinks, in control of your behaviors, or is a bodily organ, your brain, the source of your behavior? We do think the answer is self-evident, and we wouldn't even ask the question except for the fact that the recovery society (i.e. the drug and alcohol treatment industry and much of the mental health system and media) promotes the idea that your "faulty" brain tissue is controlling you and your behaviors. Addiction experts claim that *addicts'* brains are hardwired to be addicted, as well as to experience *craving* and to feel depressed, and that personal choices and desires have nothing to do with these feelings and activities. They say it's in your genes and that addiction is a medical condition that requires ongoing professional help. Many now claim that addicts need to be in treatment for life.

You've likely heard these ideas in statements such as "you've got a brain disease that causes cravings," "your

brain is hardwired for addiction,” “your free will has been hijacked by addiction,” “your reward circuits have been compromised by drugs and alcohol,” or “addiction is all about dopamine.” That last statement about dopamine (a neurotransmitter involved in many brain functions) comes from the U.S.’s top “addiction expert,” Dr. Nora Volkow, head of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, NIDA. In an article summing up her views on addiction, she said:

*The human brain is an extraordinarily complex and fine-tuned communications network containing billions of specialized cells (neurons) that give origin to our thoughts, emotions, perceptions and drives. Often, a drug is taken the first time by choice to feel pleasure or to relieve depression or stress. But this notion of choice is short-lived. Why? Because repeated drug use disrupts well-balanced systems in the human brain in ways that persist, eventually replacing a person’s normal needs and desires with a one-track mission to seek and use drugs. At this point, normal desires and motives will have a hard time competing with the desire to take a drug. (Volkow)*

Volkow’s comments reveal the key underlying premise about human nature that the recovery society promotes. Essentially, she and her addiction treatment colleagues believe that what people think is of little or no consequence with respect to what they do. Based on this statement we can surmise that she believes, and the brain disease theory of addiction holds, that the “one-track mission to seek and use drugs” is caused by the structure of the brain, not by what people think.

This view is rooted in the belief that brain tissue activity happens first, and then thoughts materialize and bubble out of blood-filled tissue, afterward. Furthermore, this perspective states that any experience of thinking hard about something, weighing your options or reasoning your way to a choice is mere illusion. From Volkow’s point of view, the brain tissue acts first (its activity having been determined by genetics, early development, and environmental factors) and then thoughts and behaviors materialize out of the blood-filled organ. Such a view leaves no room for free will, not to mention that this view never attempts to explain how a physical organ can create a metaphysical thought.

“ *The brain plays an important part in thinking, most notably by receiving direction from the mind, but also by receiving information back from the environment through the senses.* ”

This faulty brain-first premise is revealed in the first sentence of the passage above where Dr. Volkow states that the components of the brain “give origin to our thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and drives.” But she fails to explain how physical blood and protein actually form nonphysical thoughts. While no one can say where thoughts come from, we do know that a thought is beyond the physical realm, that fact is self-evident; we do not need science to prove it. So Dr. Volkow’s view that something physical creates something metaphysical is logically implausible.

The brain-first view needs to be understood so you can decide in which camp you want to be: mind-first or brain-first? A choice to believe in one or the other is unavoidable because these are mutually exclusive positions. That is, if one is true then the other cannot be true and vice-versa. In reality you already believe in one or the other based on how you view personal responsibility and whether you believe you are in control of your behaviors and choices, or whether you believe you are out of control. This matter gets to the heart of how you will actually approach your substance use habits, as well as how much control you will have in determining the course of your life from this point on.

Simply put, the argument between the recovery society’s views of a physical origin-of-thought (the brain) vs. a mind origin-of-thought addresses the issue of whether people are actually in control of their behaviors or not. If brain tissue does create your thoughts without you controlling that process, then there is really no

reason to have goals, or even think about a future since all of that would be out of your hands. The brain-first view makes people truly at the mercy of tissue, blood, genetics and random human events.

Appropriately, then, you may ask yourself whether you believe in the existence of free will or not. This is important. Answer the following questions:

- Are you aware of yourself making choices?
- Are you aware of yourself choosing what to think and what to believe?

Really think about these questions. If you are aware of making even just some of your own choices and you are aware of choosing some of your thoughts and beliefs, this is evidence of free will. If this is the case, your core beliefs are at total odds with those of the recovery

society. In 2011, Volkow was interviewed by New York Times columnist, Abigail Zugar. With respect to Volkow’s zealous rejection of human behaviors being the result of human free will, she is paraphrased as saying:

We think we have free will, she continued, but we are foiled at every turn. First our biology conspires against us with brains that are hard-wired to increase pleasure and decrease pain. Meanwhile, we are so gregarious that social systems — whether you call them peer pressure or politics — reliably dwarf us as individuals. “There is no way you can escape.”

The medical world has tried to explain every problem of human behavior by pointing to the physical workings of the brain. Most commonly, they’ve used brain scans to show that people who engage in a particular abnormal behavior have patterns of brain activity that are different from people who don’t engage in that behavior. Colorful pictures of the addicted brain next to the normal brain are used as evidence of this explanation. A difference in activity is spotted and they say “Aha! There’s the cause of the thoughts and choices to use drugs!” On the surface it seems to make perfect sense, but there’s a flaw in the logic underlying this conclusion: it is equally plausible that thoughts and behaviors happened first resulting in the brain activity witnessed on the brain scans.

Let’s say that thoughts happened first, and then those thoughts caused the changes in brain activity. What if the brain was reacting to thoughts created first in the mind? Then the whole idea that people are run by their genetics, biology, and random circumstance would be untrue. You would look at the same exact brain scans that showed high activity when drugs and alcohol were discussed, and you would say “Aha! There’s the result of the person thinking about drugs and/or alcohol. It clearly evokes strong feelings.” Which conclusion sounds more accurate to you?

Brain-first believers tend to be materialists. They only believe in what they can measure, taste, see and quantify. There are many different views that fall under this materialist umbrella, but the common theme is that in one way or another every materialist denies either the existence or the power of the mind. For example, one popular view from this camp (epiphenomenalism) says that you do experience freethinking and choice, but your thoughts don’t achieve anything, nor are they chosen by you. They’re simply a byproduct of your brain activity, which is all fully determined by genetics and previous

events. Thus any experience of free will is actually an illusion. This sounds nearly identical to the views espoused by NIDA Director, Dr. Nora Volkow, when she scoffed at the idea of free will: “We think we have free will... but we are foiled at every turn. ...our biology conspires against us with brains that are hard-wired to increase pleasure and decrease pain. There is no way you can escape.”

In other words the brain tissue with all its physical limitations conspires to destroy its owner with substance use, and “There is no way you can escape” because your brain is hard-wired from birth. If this is true then it means that human beings don’t have a mind that is capable of causing behavior. There is just a physical brain, which is a helpless random player in the chaotic but predetermined human experience. Furthermore brain-first theorists say that people are destined to have their physical wiring force their thoughts into realms of self-destructive predetermined misery from which there is no escape.

Does anyone find it strange that Nora Volkow herself does not seem to be at the mercy of this doomed condition? She and her addiction professional colleagues tell the rest of the world how doomed they are. This means, of course, that those in this elite class may be the only ones genetically advanced enough not to be at the mercy of their biology. Based on what she has said, she sees the world as full of weak, lost beings; always in need of being helped by those like her who have been blessed with the

ability to problem solve (something brain-first theorists say cannot exist.) While the view that we are all preprogrammed to hurt ourselves seems plausible when experts talk about those in dire need of help,

the fallacy becomes obvious when you realize the experts themselves do not seem to be vulnerable to it. In other words their theory does not apply to them. They need it both ways for their arguments to stand up.

This presents a huge problem for the brain-first crowd. Folks like Dr. Volkow use thoughts and attention and acts of the mind, to discuss and write about the existence of the brain, but then she denies the key faculty she used to create, organize and write down her own self-created thoughts. Her position implies that self-created, chosen thoughts don’t exist but that very discussion requires self-created thought!

The brain-first crowd can’t explain their denial of the mind’s existence without directly using the processes of their minds. Thus, the brain-first believers’ position is antithetical unto itself. To claim that the mind doesn’t really exist, but then use it to think and problem solve,

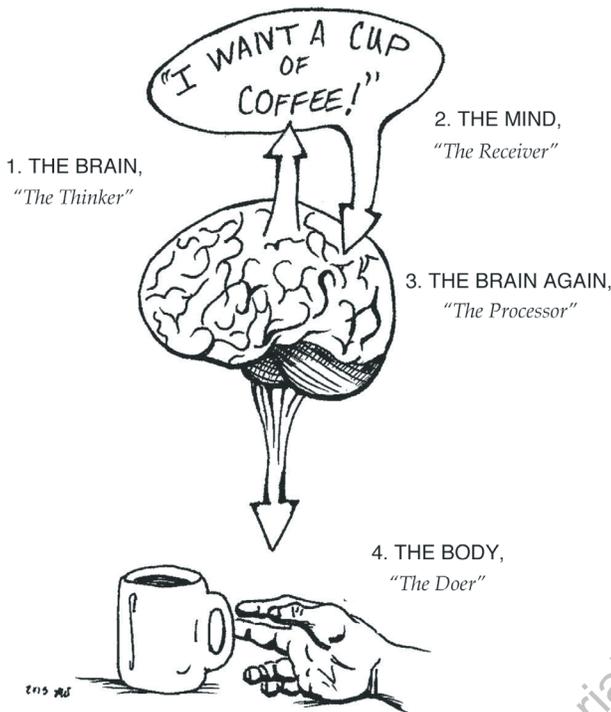
“

*Your understanding of the mind and brain and their relationship to each other determines whether you are actually in control of yourself or whether you are run by biology.*

”

frustrates the very claim that the mind does not exist!  
 The “brain-first” philosophy could be visually represented like this:

## BRAIN-FIRST CAUSATION



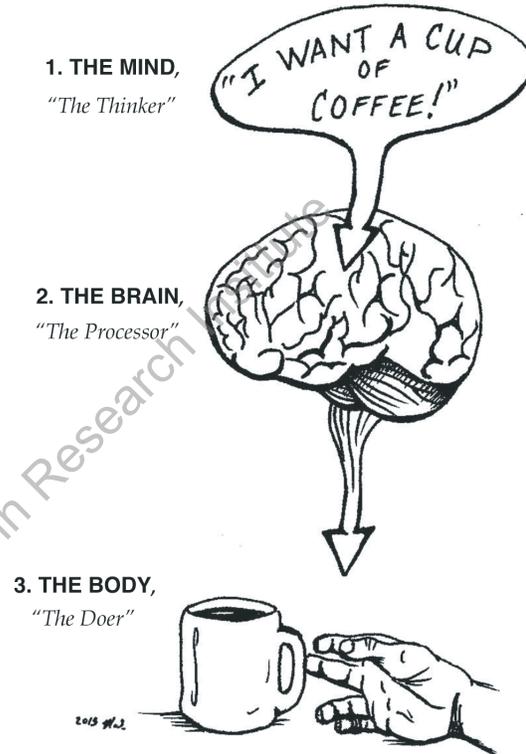
### Mind-First Causation

On the other side of the debate are those who believe that the brain is separate from the mind. In this view there is mental thought (created in the mind) and a physical component (the brain) that processes the thought given to it from the mind. The term “dualist” (representing the two) is often used to describe this interaction. There are many different sub-views among the mind-first group. Some think that the mind is a disembodied soul as described by religions, while others think it’s some kind of unique energy, activity, or information. But the bottom line in the mind-first populous is that there is some kind of mental energy that you control; and what you do with it affects your brain, your body and your behavior.

These would be the mind-first crowd. They believe that the mind, although esoteric, is real and that the brain is obedient to it. They further believe that the mind ultimately causes a person’s physical behavior by processing its instructions through the brain tissue.

We opened this discussion by asking whether you believe the mind is in control, or that one of your bodily organs, your brain, is in control of your behavior. Or put another

## MIND-FIRST CAUSATION



way: are you in the brain-first crowd or the mind-first crowd? It should be obvious from our Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation presented in an earlier chapter that we are decidedly in the mind-first crowd.

Consider the following conversation with a brain-first believer:

*“Where did your addiction come from?”*

*“My brain tissue created it, and my faulty circuits told me to drink/drug.”*

*“Really, how did it do that?”*

*“I don’t know. The doctors told me my brain has become hard-wired from addiction, and that I have an addictive personality. My brain wants the surge of dopamine provided by drugs and alcohol.”*

*“But again, how did your brain tell you to drink/drug?”*



These are passed to the mind and reorganized into feelings, emotions and thoughts based on those sense-based stimuli. Life is experienced as a two-lane highway of information with the brain firmly fixed in the center. On the one side is creative thought driving the brain to perform its dance, and in the opposite direction is the brain receiving information from the body's senses and sending that information back to the mind for further interpretation. Thus is the human existence formed and experienced. Without the mind humans would not know that they are human, nor could they experience life. What an amazing gift!

Now as you move forward in the program, decide which view makes more sense to you. Is it a brain-first world or a mind-first world? You get to choose what you believe. But remember, whatever view you decide to believe creates

your reality so be willing to accept the ramifications of that viewpoint. Simply put, brain-first equals little to no control over your environment and circumstances. Mind-first equals tremendous control over your sphere of influence and your life. We do understand that right now you may not be entirely aware of where many of your thoughts originate; this process is designed for you to increase your self-awareness so that you can gain control over all of your thoughts; and in doing so, your behaviors as well.

Our decision was made over twenty years ago; the Freedom Model®, CBE® and this curriculum are all mind-first based and the results have been astounding. We hope you will join the many that have chosen to take full responsibility of their thoughts, actions, and ultimately their wonderful future successes.

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## CHAPTER 7

# The Science of Personal Change

*“A man is literally what he thinks, his character being the complete sum of his thoughts.”*

– As a Man Thinketh, James Allen, 1902

This chapter is devoted to the scientific view of human habits and motivated behaviors. By understanding neuroplasticity you will gain insight into how to change and let go of the habits that bring you unhappiness, and you will gain insight into how to build greater momentum in those habits that bring you satisfaction and fulfillment. We will also address the scientifically correct, but surprising, definition of “addiction.”

In order to fully appreciate how you can prevail over substance use, depression, and self-defeating behaviors, it is important to understand the science of personal change. Change is a simple word, but for a person in deep depression or with self-destructive personal habits, change can seem impossible. Personal change begins within an individual’s mind. Remember, the brain will follow; it does not have a choice because it is run by the instructions (thoughts), creative abilities and problem solving skills given to it by the mind. The mind is the cause of all human behaviors and the brain is the hardware that processes those thoughts and enables us to act.

No one can inject you with a medicinal positive thought or thrust upon you sets of positive emotions and values to make you feel better. Personal change, by its very nature, must be created by you and then enacted through your decisions, emotions and physical actions. All personal change is derived under full control of each individual. Remember, one reason why many scientists ignore the mind’s existence is because they can’t directly observe people’s minds. This is because each person thinks

for himself within himself, and each person is the only one who directly experiences his own thoughts. Other people can only know what you’re thinking if you decide to tell them. This ultra-personal autonomous nature is what puts thoughts into a special category of existence (metaphysical). Each one of us has sole access to, and control over, our own thoughts. No one can think for another person.

Change happens as a function of will, discipline and desire, all products of the individually controlled mind. To start the change process you must first be motivated to do so and you must gain an understanding of what motivates you. Keep in mind the Freedom Model® and the indisputable motive of the pursuit of happiness. This pursuit is constantly occurring within your mind whether you know it or not. Every moment of life is a constant cost vs. benefit analysis of what will provide you the most fulfillment and relative happiness in that particular moment, every single moment of your life.

**Ask yourself the following questions:**

*“What do I value in life?”*

*“Who is the person I want to be?”*

*“Who is the person I want to present to others?”*

These very questions will be asked and analyzed in detail throughout this program, giving you a much more accurate and more productive self-awareness and a heightened sense of clarity in your new life's mission. Again the Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation gets to the core of this:

*What do you believe is your best path towards happiness?*

*Is it time to analyze and revise your views on this topic?*

As you journey through this adventure you will learn how and what you may want to change to achieve your life's mission.

## **The Plastic Brain: An Adaptable Computer**

Now that you understand that the mind and brain are two separate entities with differing functions, the question is how can this information benefit you? The answer to that question is that by providing an explicit and detailed map of what role your brain plays in your habits, you can learn to think in a way that opens the path to efficient positive change.

First, we should be clear in stating that nobody knows the full extent of exactly how the mind and the brain interact. To be sure, there are real brain diseases, disorders, conditions, and injuries that seem to rob people of the ability to have full mental functions. It is not unlike a computer that has the best, most advanced and creative software, but attempts to function within hardware that is defective or has sustained irreparable damage. No matter the intelligence of the software, the software program is going to have a hard time expressing itself through a damaged set of hardware.

On the other hand, there are cases in which, from all outward appearances, a person is in a vegetative state, however, it was later found that they were fully aware of what was going on the whole time: that is, they were hearing, seeing, and thinking the whole time, yet unable to communicate it to anyone else. Thankfully, the brain is a complicated but highly resilient computer!

Because the mind-brain transactions begin and end outside the physical realm, the computer analogy clarifies this complicated relationship. Like all other analogies, it is imperfect; but it's close enough to offer some important

insights. In this analogy, as we've said, the brain supports the mind and gives it a platform on which to operate, but it does not call the shots. The software (the mind) tells the hardware (the brain) where to store and access information, which processing circuits to use, and where to dedicate the most power, and to carry out precise functions and applications that are usable in the physical world. Recent research on neuroplasticity (the brain's plastic or physically adaptable nature) seems to confirm that the thoughts of the mind direct the activity of the brain and actually cause this supercomputer to physically rewire itself to function more efficiently.

Neuroplasticity is the brain's natural ability to physically alter itself to accommodate the instructions provided by the mind. It explains how activities of the mind actually affect the brain's physical structure; i.e. repetitive thoughts rewire the brain's neuronal structures. The fact is that your brain is continuously adapting to external circumstances and new decisions, and subsequently accommodates certain brain tissue real estate as a result. Your brain is in a constant state of change.

As you think (with your mind) on any topic in a repetitive manner the brain activity adjusts, making that thought pattern process more efficient, and thus more easily habituated and repeated the next time. Sounds reasonable and it is. It's the scientific understanding of the learning process. In the same way that a computer dedicates more processing power to those applications that get the most use, the human brain dedicates more physical brain real estate to process thoughts and activities to which you pay the most attention. The brain couldn't care less about what the thoughts are, because the brain does not think (or "care," or "feel"). The brain simply processes thoughts given to it by the thinker, the mind (which does the "caring" and "feeling").

Imagine a computer that is driven by very complex and emotionally driven software. The software is the mind, while the physical hardware that processes that software is the brain. Does a metallic motherboard and hard drive care whether it runs a basic series of software programs or more complex ones? Of course, it doesn't. It simply does what it is told to do. But if the computer hardware is designed well, the processor will prioritize the information, recalculate the functions it is being asked to perform to make them faster and use less power, and shelve those functions not being used at that time. It stores those functions away for later use if needed. Now multiply the storage capabilities almost infinitely, make the hardware able to problem-solve with amazing, blinding speed, and create the greatest software program yet to be developed in the known universe, and you have just created the mind and the brain of a human being... YOU!

Your computer hardware (your brain) has been customized to carry out those thoughts and choices you've repeated most often. Let us repeat that: *your brain has been customized to carry out those thoughts and choices you've repeated most often.* It's on the ready, able to jump into the previous processing routines and access your most referenced data in an instant. Brain tissue is genetically geared towards adapting to the most repetitious and motivated thoughts and activities given to it by the mind. Science confirms this.

Emerging research over the past few decades has shown that the human brain is in fact plastic (an adaptable, always changing organ) throughout one's entire life. (Doidge, 2007; Schwartz & Begley, 2003) Every experience you have reshapes and rewires your brain, every day of your life, customizing it to better process those thoughts and actions to which you give the most focus on a day-to-day basis. Here are just a few examples which science has confirmed. If you practice playing a musical instrument often, your brain adjusts to dedicate more area and activity to playing music. (Gaser & Schlaug, 2003) If you are a taxi driver driving the streets of large city, your brain dedicates more area to storing and processing maps. (McGuire, et.al., 2000) And, if you practice using substances as your main source of happiness, your brain adjusts to process your thoughts of using substances more efficiently, too. Practice, literally, makes perfect, as your brain creates new and improved pathways to allow your most frequently chosen thoughts to pass through and go into action faster and faster each time you repeat them. You think, then physically act and finally become what you think!

Quite simply stated, you feel addicted to substances and other behaviors for many reasons, but for the most part it is because your brain adapts to motivated, repetitious behaviors. It learns and provides a more efficient platform to repeat your desires more easily each time. You become very good at getting drunk and/or high, or any activity you are motivated to perform repeatedly.

Numerous studies have shown that substance users most frequently quit using by virtue of their own neuroplastic power; in other words they think their way to new goals and values that do not include substance use. (Schwartz & Begley, 2002) The recovery society ignores this simple but incredibly powerful fact. The brain being changeable explains many things. It explains why people are able to adapt, and just as important, how and why humans can get

stuck and feel as if they are victims of an inexplicable fate. The next statement is vital to understand: neuroplasticity cuts both ways; the physical brain can equally become a slave to positive thought or a slave to negative thought; *you get to choose which one; you always have and always will.*

## What is Hebb's Law?

Hebb's Law states *neurons that fire together, wire together*, which makes a larger, more efficient pipeline for repetitive thoughts. (Doidge, 2007) This explains why people become accustomed to making certain choices, and why it becomes easier and easier to make those same choices the more often those thoughts are repeated. The brain does not know the difference between a productive or positive choice and an unproductive or negative one (that is up to the mind). It only responds to the fact that you keep making the same choice, and if you make that same choice repetitively, e.g. going to the bar after work every day, the neurons in your brain tissue will connect to support that choice and thought pattern.

In the recovery society, this repetitive pattern of choosing culturally unacceptable life options is called "addiction." But because this label is loaded with cultural baggage, this program will not use that label to explain why people become seemingly stuck in certain patterns. Rather, this text accurately calls such patterns learned, motivated, repetitive choice, or habits. Choices, including habitual choices, can be freely repeated, changed, or stopped, unlike the common view of addiction that says you are powerless, permanently altered, and doomed to repeat the same behavior.

In the classic definition of addiction, there is a loss of control and a physical craving beyond the user's ability to resist. However, millions of substance users have chosen to stop and will continue to choose to stop, even in the face of painful physical withdrawal symptoms that can accompany cessation of some substances. Remarkably, the human body quite naturally detoxifies itself in 3-30 days following a heavy substance user making the choice to stop using substances. As physical withdrawal symptoms subside, the now substance free ex-substance user is left with an infinite number of choices. Many substance users thought that they had lost control, only to discover after withdrawal that they really were in control all of the time. Bear in mind, no one ever loses control without *deciding*

“

*As you journey through this adventure you will learn how and what you may want to change to achieve your life's mission.*

”

to do so first. And remember the concept of choosing to relinquish control described in the previous chapters; you must make a choice to believe in loss of control for it to become real to you. This means that the decision to lose control is controlled, which is self-created choice. You, like everyone else, have always been in control, after all!

Addiction is actually a choice-driven repetitive, highly motivated pattern of decisions, and these choices can be changed by any individual at any time. The first requirement is to stop reinforcing the erroneous idea that you are addicted, which in turn will break that self-created neuronal lock in your brain. Do this, and your brain will change because your brain does not have a choice. Choices only take place in the mind. The more one's mind thinks about a certain topic ('I am going to the bar to get drunk'), the more the neuronal structure of the brain changes and adapts to accommodate that thought. Neurons will then group together to build a bigger, more efficient path for that particular thought. Sections of brain not currently being used will then begin to adapt and allocate greater resources to that thought. This is known as the "use it, or lose it" phenomenon first described in the mid-sixties by Dr. Michael Merzenich. (Doidge, 2007) But the opposite is also true. If you think, "I am not going to the bar today," and you don't go to the bar, then the brain will begin to build circuits to make that particular series of motivated, repeated thoughts that much easier.

The more repetitious the thought, the more dedicated the brain's structure will be to adapting to it. This explains why some people become habituated, repeating certain choices. This is true in their careers, marriages, friendships, and lifestyles, in general. Thought based brain adaptation (neuroplasticity) is the natural manner in which all people live. We have heard much the same story over and over again from the many crack users with whom we have worked, "I was going about my business with no intention of using. I was totally dedicated to moving on with my life and then, all of a sudden the car took a turn and I ended up at the crack house. Then I was off to the races again smoking crack for the next week! And, you're trying to tell me that I'm not addicted!"

That is exactly what we are saying: "You are not addicted." Being addicted implies being powerless. Instead, this example illustrates a pattern of desire and motivation, two qualities of thought that force neuronal adaptation geared towards going to the crack house. If an individual sees value in a certain choice, based on excitement or life experiences or desire for a new course of action, and

is motivated to make that choice repeatedly, the brain adjusts itself to support a more efficient way of carrying out the behaviors associated with that thought. This makes each subsequent similar thought, choice, and action that much easier to process. Remember that thoughts affect the brain, not the other way around.

## Use it or Lose it and Competitive Neuroplasticity

Much ado is made of the fact that drug and alcohol use triggers the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter believed to be involved in the physical experience of reward. The "diseasers" (people who believe substance use is a disease) talk about how the reward system becomes hijacked in addiction. As a result of this "hijacking", it becomes completely focused on getting the dopamine surges provided by substance use. These same theorists lament how "normal rewards" also involve dopamine, and further theorize that "normal rewards"

are in competition with the rewards of substance use. Yet it is this exact same fact that allows for meaningful neuroplastic change in people with substance use problems.

The use it or lose it principle describes when brain circuits and neurons go unused, these same unused circuits will then die off or rewire to support other functions we choose to perform. Essentially, functions that use the same basic areas, or nearby areas of the brain will compete for, and move into, unused space and make use of it, if needed; thus the term "competitive neuroplasticity." Dramatic examples of this principle in action include experiments where it was shown that if a finger is amputated, then the space in the brain tissue that formerly connected to that finger will be invaded by new connections to the other fingers. (Doidge, 2007; Schwartz & Begley, 2003) In another extreme experiment, subjects were fully blindfolded for five days, and their sense of touch began to take up residence in the visual cortex of the brain that had been deprived of its normal use. (Doidge, 2007; Schwartz & Begley, 2003) In essence their fingers were "seeing." If you cease to use a set of neurons for their previously assigned purpose, they will cease to be dedicated to that purpose, and find new ones. Thus, the name of the principle: "use it or lose it."

Where this gets really exciting and turns the existing addiction paradigm on its head is when you consider the reward systems that are involved with drug and alcohol use. Yes, it is believed that using substances triggers

“ Numerous studies have shown that substance users most frequently quit using by virtue of their own neuroplastic power; in other words they think their way to new goals and values that do not include substance use. ”

dopamine release in these systems, but dopamine is involved in so many rewards! Certainly, it’s involved in all of the activities normally considered as potentially “addictive”, such as sex, gambling, eating, and shopping, but these are just the tip of the iceberg. Love, hugs, smiles, happy memories, and intellectual stimulation involve dopamine as well. According to a leading dopamine researcher, anything that we believe to be interesting, such as ideas and intellectual concepts, will deliver jolts of dopamine that are as powerful (or more so) as those triggered by the more traditionally “addicting,” or better described, habitual, activities. (Lehrer, 2008) In another New York Times article, even Nora Volkow admits this; she is paraphrased as saying “...our dopamine-driven salience detector will focus on familiar objects that we have imbued with high value...” (Angier, 2009)

Now, because of the fact that whatever people mentally assign value to may trigger dopamine release, and the facts of the “use it or lose it” principle, and the existence of competitive neuroplasticity, the path to changing the neuronal wiring associated with substance use is simple:

- Deprive your old substance use circuits of use by ceasing substance use.
- Focus on exploring what you find to be valuable and potentially rewarding to you.
- Repetitively make new choices that reflect your new (or renewed) values.

By doing this, you literally lose the substance use circuits, and their cortical real estate gets a new owner: whatever new dopamine triggering values you decide to focus on. Hebb’s Law kicks in and you rewire your dopamine system to be attuned to your new choices.

The use it or lose it principle is reflected in the common experience of getting rusty at something. You might’ve been great at algebra in the past, but if you haven’t used it since high school, you might feel a little rusty and become lost when you try to help your 14 year old with algebra homework. As you moved on with life and focused on other mental skills and pursuits, your brain appropriated those areas that were once assigned to algebra for the mental skills you subsequently used more often. Or, keeping with the software analogy, your hard drive was rewritten with more current information. This same process will happen when you drop substance use for other pursuits. One day, you will be rusty at substance use and doing other things with your time will be much more natural, intuitive, and rewarding.

This is where all the latest science leads us, and our experience with thousands of troubled substance users confirms this understanding of habit change. We have repeatedly seen people who once felt helpless

and powerless make the bold choice to change, get interested in new pursuits, grow and adapt, and move on from any notion of being addicted, struggling, or fearful of the inevitable “relapse.” However, we’ve also seen many who stayed mired in old theories, attached to the known comfort of a lifetime of “support” for their “incurable disease of addiction”; a notion supported by the outdated science of a “hardwired brain.” Changing takes courage.

## The Plastic vs. the Hardwired Brain

Contrary to the understanding of a plastic brain presented above, it was once widely believed that the human brain was hardwired from genetic endowments at birth and environmental influences within the first few years of life. In this view, various functions and skills had specific areas of the brain that caused them, and once they were wired up, they stayed that way until death; hence the term “hardwired.”

If something went wrong or the brain was injured in a particular area, then it was believed that whatever function was associated with that area would be permanently altered or lost. For example, if brain tissue was damaged by a stroke, you would permanently lose control over the parts of your body controlled by that region of the brain. Then you would simply have to learn to cope with your dysfunction. Today we know that people don’t necessarily have to learn to live with the dysfunction. Researchers have been able to guide people towards regaining the use of their once paralyzed limbs through sheer force of will. (Schwartz & Begley, 2003) By putting a painstaking amount of work and will into repeatedly trying to use their paralyzed limbs, people have regained function as another unharmed part of the brain eventually begins to wire to those limbs. This is self-directed neuroplasticity at its most extreme and delivers a lethal blow to the hardwired brain theory that was once so popular.

Other examples of the plastic nature of the brain abound, and there aren’t many neuroscientists holding on to the hardwired theory today. Nevertheless, pop psychologists can always be found feeding the media stories about how the brain is hardwired to do this or that thing; claiming that people are hardwired for selfishness, altruism, belief in God, atheism, conservatism, liberalism, racism, depression, anger, etc.

If it’s a controversial human trait or behavior, especially those referred to as addictions, there is someone out there claiming that people are hardwired to do it, and thus unable to change unless some sort of medical miracle is found. Amazingly, they refer to neuroplasticity

when explaining how the brain becomes “addicted” (over time and with repetition the addictive activity changes the brain chemistry and structure), but then they employ the hardwired theory by claiming that the changes in the brain are permanent; often while using the actual term “hardwired”; without a hint of irony! If people weren’t swept away by the fancy colorful brain scan evidence, then they might actually recognize this contradiction and realize that it disproves the hardwire theory on its own.

## Self-Directed Neuroplasticity

There is a mountain of evidence showing that voluntary thoughts both change brain activity and cause long-term neuroplastic changes in the brain. This is known as self-directed neuroplasticity. One review paper from the journal *Progress In Neurobiology* pulls together results from dozens of peer reviewed studies which show the real power of the mind to turn activity on or off in the various regions of the brain known as “pleasure centers.” (Beauregard, 2007) When people take a placebo under the belief that it is actually a powerful painkilling drug, they experience less pain, and this is reflected by changes in activity in the brain regions that normally process pain. The expectation that “I will have less pain” actually causes the secretion of dopamine in pain processing regions of the brain which regulates activity in other parts of the brain associated with pain, which then results in less pain. Another placebo study on a powerful anti-depressant showed that those who believed they were taking a drug which would cure their depression actually altered brain activity in several of the same areas altered by the actual drug. (Beauregard, 2007) In this case, an equal number of patients on both placebo and the real drug responded positively and experienced fewer symptoms of depression. Expectation, a process of the mind, preceded changes in the brain.

This same *Progress in Neurobiology* paper also looked at neuroplastic changes caused by volitional thought. Beauregard reviewed studies on several models of therapy, including cognitive models:

*“Cognitive psychotherapy, for instance, focuses on negative cognitions (e.g., thoughts, beliefs, thinking patterns, schemata) that account for the development and maintenance of the psychopathological state (Beck and Friedman, 1990). In this form of therapy, the patient is taught to consciously recognize these negative cognitions and voluntarily modify them.”*

He concluded that:

*“...the results of these studies support the view that the mental functions and processes involved in the various types of psychotherapy exert a significant influence on the functioning and plasticity of the brain.”*

When people engage in the long-term practice of choosing new thoughts, beliefs, and thinking patterns, such as those taught in our CBE® workbooks, they experience real changes in their brain.

All of the evidence reviewed here is really just the tip of the iceberg. Much more is out there and there is much more to come. Yet, there are still those who would deny both the power of the freely thinking human mind to create a person’s personal behavior and quality of life. Indeed, many would even deny the very existence of the mind; opting instead to attempt to reduce their inner lives to nothing more than brain activity over which they have no control.

The ideas spread by the brain-first recovery industry make no logical sense and are actually harmful. We agree with Beauregard who upon reviewing the evidence concluded that:

*“...the tendency of modern neuroscience and biological psychiatry toward neurobiological reductionism, i.e., the reduction of persons to their brains (a form of “neural anthropomorphism”), is ill-advised and socially hazardous. We must keep in mind that the whole human person, not merely a part of a brain, thinks, feels, or believes. Indeed, the human person cannot be reduced to neural processes.”*

You have a mind; it is powerful, and you will cause meaningful change within yourself by choosing new patterns of thought.

## Either Nothing is Addicting or Everything is Addicting

Addiction is defined by Webster’s Dictionary as: “Compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance (as heroin, nicotine, or alcohol) characterized by tolerance and by well-defined physiological symptoms upon withdrawal; broadly: persistent compulsive use of a substance known by the user to be harmful.” “Compulsive need, persistent compulsive use....”

This shortened version of the definition of addiction describes the process of (1) conscious thoughts,

and then (2) physical action or behaviors. This is a simplified neuroplastic process description of mind and body adaptation. If you repeatedly think and act about something and you are highly motivated, the structure within your brain will positively adapt to make those thoughts more efficient and easier for you to have the next time. Again, this is called self-directed neuroplasticity; a normal function of brain adaptation. The mind and body thus become physically and mentally tolerant of substance use. Changes in the body and brain accommodate both the substance and the thoughts of using substances. These thoughts and consequences can be reversed as easily as they were created. This happens for thousands of people every day. They stop ingesting a substance, medically detox if needed, and then make choices that are devoid of substance use. Seemingly miraculously, their minds go back to a state that existed before their substance use habit was created and in many cases the individuals move themselves into an improved mental, physical and emotional state.

Consider that Webster's definition of addiction says addiction is a "compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance (as heroin, nicotine, or alcohol)..." It is significant that the examples (i.e. heroin, nicotine and alcohol) used by Webster's definition all have a negative social reputation. And, according to Webster's definition, these three substances are "habit-forming substance[s]."

Insomuch as habit plays an important role in defining addiction, what is habit? According to the Merriam Webster's American English Dictionary, habit is defined as: "...a usual manner of behavior ... a behavior pattern acquired and fixed by frequent repetition ... an acquired mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary."

Not surprising, these definitions of "habit" also describe self-directed neuroplastic change. "...a behavior pattern acquired and fixed by frequent repetition." This motivated repetition (think hitting the bar every night) then wears a neuronal path in the brain, which by definition puts in place a neuroplastic change that helps make a habitual action that much easier to carry out. Still, does this mean that everything you think about has the potential to be "addicting?" If you were to look at how the brain and body are positively and negatively affected by your dominant thoughts, the answer is absolutely yes, everything.

If addiction does exist, it would need to be accurately defined as a normal process of brain adaptation that

occurs constantly within our bodies and brains based on habits we are motivated to create and keep reinforcing with additional similar thoughts and actions. Self-directed neuroplasticity is addiction in a nutshell. All of this is predicated on the desire and motives and actions of the individual. Thus, mental or psychological addiction, as it's called sometimes, in the classic negative Western culture definition falls far short of its mark because it only deals with negative thought processes. Again, this is a cultural misrepresentation of the concept.

Consider this statement: everything is addicting or nothing is addicting. Doesn't each part of this statement say the exact same thing? Positive thoughts create positive "addiction." In other words, the classically defined addiction is nothing more than a normal, chosen, self-directed neuroplastic response to what you decide to think about, repetitively, good and bad, fulfilling and unfulfilling. A person who dwells on the negative worries of life builds neuronal pathways that make those thoughts easier to repeat, and thus easier to reinforce in their experience. Such thoughts actually create a negative person, eventually.

Whether thoughts are positive or negative has no bearing on this self-directed neuroplastic change. Remember, the brain is hardware, a literal slave to your thinking mind. If your thoughts are negative and highly dedicated, the effect upon your physical body and welfare will be negative. Your world will reflect your negativity. You essentially create a negative state in the mind, which then has a snowball effect in the body and finally manifests in your external life. On the other hand, if your thoughts are positive and highly dedicated, the effect upon your physical body and welfare will be positive. Your external behavior will thus be affected, positively. The brain literally does not know the difference between positive thoughts and negative thoughts; it simply reacts to thoughts and then processes those thoughts as instructed by the information given to it by the mind, the thinker.

This is all good news. Whatever damage you feel has been done by your choice to use substances, your body and brain have an incredible capacity for overcoming and repairing this damage. And, your brain is simply a tool of the mind, *which can be changed at will*, reversing any and all poor habits you might have. Remember that: "A man is literally what he thinks, his character being the complete sum of his thoughts." [As a Man Thinketh, James Allen, 1902]

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*Mental or psychological addiction, as it's called sometimes, in the classic negative Western culture definition falls far short of its mark because it only deals with negative thought processes.*

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## CHAPTER 8

# What is "Physical Addiction"?

*"Thoughts lead on to purpose, purpose leads on to actions,  
actions form habits, habits decide character  
and character fixes our destiny."*

– Tryon Edwards, American Theologian (1809–1894)

Many of our guests are concerned with making a distinction between drugs that are said to be "physically addictive" and those that are not. In the larger scheme of things though, this distinction may be insignificant because "physical addiction", also known as "dependence", is completely reversible with minimum time and effort. To understand this, you need to look at what "physical addiction" is, and how it comes about as well as its consequences. Remember, we are not discussing psychological/mental addiction; that was addressed in the last chapter. Simply put, all mental/psychological addiction is an outcome of normal, chosen, self-directed neuroplasticity.

Let us now clear up one very important misconception. That is, the word "addiction" implies powerlessness in the popular recovery society view; this narrow-minded view is true only to the extent that a person believes it to be true. This vision of addiction, especially "physical addiction," conjures up images of struggling addicts who have lost control of themselves and need drugs to survive and function. This view has spread to many other types of habitual behaviors and choices such as shopping, gambling, relationships, sex, pornography, fatty foods, sugary foods, sports, video games, TV, etc. People have reported strong feelings of desire, cravings, withdrawal and jonesing for all sorts of things that don't necessarily involve ingesting an intoxicating substance. So first, it's imperative to understand that people can feel addicted and powerless over literally anything. This is because self-directed neuroplasticity that is based on

repetitive wants and desires is a normal, unavoidable aspect of the human experience.

The inner turmoil that someone can feel when a lover refuses to see them again can be an equally as terrible experience as stopping a \$500 a day heroin habit cold turkey. It all depends on the thoughts one has, such as how important and meaningful they think the object of their addiction is to them. This is because through repetition of previous thoughts and actions, they have neuroplastically trained their brain to expect the "addicting" experience (the time with your lover or intake of an intoxicant such as crack cocaine, for example) at regular intervals. The neuroplastic changes make it easy to keep expecting the experience, and feel out of sorts when you don't experience it. Depending on your beliefs about how bad it will be to go without the object of your addiction, it may feel mildly annoying or it may feel devastating and threatening to your entire way of life and sanity. The mind is capable of creating intense physiological reactions that release powerful neurotransmitters, abnormal storms of brain activity, and hence create real physical feelings, without the presence of any outside chemicals; all this chaos is produced by the power of thought. This is all supported by the intensified and efficient wiring you create in your brain as a product of your natural self-directed neuroplasticity and by your motivated repetitious focus on a given activity.

This remains a problem no matter what your addiction is: if you believe something is your best and perhaps only way

to feel happiness, and that not having that thing is awful, then you will hurt when you don't have it. If you change your thoughts and beliefs over time and come to revalue the thing, then you can learn to be happier and feel better without it. You can create a neuroplastic change in which you no longer feel deprived and in need. However, with all this said, there is a different class of adaptations that are completely separate from self-directed neuroplastic thought based changes. That classification is the main topic of this chapter: "physical addiction."

## "Physical Addiction", The Product of Neurochemical Adaptation

Some drugs affect the body and brain in such a way that it has to chemically adjust its natural activity, including, for example, the number of various neurotransmitters. You may have heard of neurotransmitters being involved in creating feelings of pleasure and pain reduction, but it's important to know that neurotransmitters are involved in many more functions than just creating pleasure and pain. This includes keeping the body functioning properly, such as by sending signals to regulate your heart rate, digestion, etc.

The human body is constantly working internally to find homeostasis with whatever conditions it is exposed to on a regular basis. (McKeown & West, 2012) In other words it tries to stay in a neutral state or balance between how much your pleasures affect the body and its functions. For example, if you fall in love it is common to lose your appetite during the first stages of this passionate time. Eventually though, the neurotransmitters involved in consciously feeling the elation of passion and falling in love will readjust to insure you receive the signals necessary to maintain a healthy appetite. Another example might be, if you continuously bombard the body with a drug that releases certain neurotransmitters (or blocks them as does heroin), the brain lowers (or raises) its natural release of neurotransmitters to compensate for the abnormal release the drug is causing. There are many ways that drugs and alcohol affect the brain and body and cause it to physically adapt, which includes changing metabolic processes. These physical adaptations lead to two important effects: tolerance and withdrawal; the presence of which is known as "physical addiction" or "physical dependence."

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*Increased tolerance doesn't cause anyone to use more of a drug.*

”

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) *tolerance* is when the body adapts to a drug, requiring more of it to achieve a certain effect. To state this more simply: tolerance is when you need more of a drug to get high because your body gets used to the drug.

Withdrawal is also due to the body adapting to the presence of a drug, but withdrawal occurs when the user decides to quit using the drug. The systems regulating the body's normal operation go haywire as they now have to adapt back to the state that existed prior to the drug being used. The absence of the drug can create a myriad of physical problems such as nausea, problems with blood pressure and heart rate, digestive problems, potentially fatal seizures, and even hallucinations (e.g. delirium tremens in the case of alcohol). In simplest terms the brain and its signals to the body need time to readjust and get back to a more normal state. The time period between quitting the habitual substance(s) and the body returning to the state it was in prior to the substance use habit is where the potential for withdrawal symptoms can occur.

Now let's be clear about exactly what *tolerance and withdrawal* syndromes cause; they cause: tolerance and withdrawal symptoms. That's it. Increased tolerance doesn't cause anyone to

use more of a drug. Wanting to get high causes people to use a drug. Remember: mind first! The tolerance comes after someone has made and acted on that decision over and over again. The body then provides the necessary signals that you will need to take more of the drug than you used to take if you want to get high.

Likewise, withdrawal can cause in some cases painful and in the most extreme cases, potentially physical symptoms, but it doesn't cause further substance use. People use drugs because they want to get high. If they don't want to get high, then they can stop using, and weather the discomfort of most withdrawal symptoms. For some symptoms though, they may need medical attention to be safe (as in the case of extreme alcohol and benzodiazepine use). But with that said, anyone going through the detox process is not, at any time, forced beyond his or her will to use a drug by their withdrawal symptoms. Of course the adaptations that your body has made in response to heavy drug use may cause you to experience painful symptoms when you stop using. You may choose to alleviate those symptoms with further drug use, or you may just deal with them, or you might seek medical help to lessen the discomfort and to ensure

safety while experiencing withdrawal; but you *never* lack the ability to choose any of these or other options.

It was once thought that addiction was all about physical dependence, which has often been dramatized in movies and television. There are more than a few problems with these theories of addiction and physical dependence. Many people believe in addictions that have nothing to do with putting a substance into the body. For example, there are groups of people who regularly meet to work on their lip balm use addiction. While lip balm use seems like an innocuous activity to most people, those who *suffer* from it are deadly serious as to the debilitating effects of this *addiction!* But as it is with nearly all *addictive* behaviors, addictions are usually not accompanied by *physical addiction* symptoms. Consider that most people, who practice habitual behaviors, including those using drugs, experience no significant addiction symptoms so long as they continue the behavior. Perhaps more importantly, users of drugs that are claimed to cause physical addiction symptoms, regularly detoxify themselves. For most, the physical symptoms pass in a matter of a few short days and then many return to heavy use of the same drug after a period of abstinence, even though they are no longer physically dependent. What’s more, people who aren’t using drugs for happiness, such as patients in hospitals who are habituated to high levels of morphine for pain relief, regularly endure the pain of withdrawal as they leave the hospital, as if they simply have the flu and they display no drug-seeking behavior whatsoever.

*Physical dependence doesn’t cause substance use*; it is a separate phenomenon from what is commonly known as addiction. This is not a controversial opinion at this point in the history of theories about addiction. Even the NIDA, the biggest propagator of the disease model of addiction, agrees:

***Physical dependence can happen with the chronic use of many drugs—including many prescription drugs, even if taken as instructed. Thus, physical dependence in and of itself does not constitute addiction, but it often accompanies addiction.***

Even though they readily admit that physical dependence is a discrete phenomenon from the behavior known as *addiction*, many addiction professionals will still refer to the existence of physical *addiction* as either proof of or a feature of the disease of addiction when it serves their purposes. The APA (*American Psychological Association*) lists physical dependence as part of its criteria

for diagnosing *addiction*, even though it clearly isn’t a necessary component. The recovery society has woven a confusing and mystical all ensnaring web to capture as many customers as possible into their contrived disease.

While drug and alcohol use is not a disease, drugs and alcohol can, literally, be compared to poisons. When entering the body, drugs and alcohol cause your body to react in strange ways. Once inside the body, the body needs to work to detoxify itself from the presence of drugs and alcohol. This can clearly present medical problems for which we recommend people seek medical help; but the wider problem of addiction whereby people repeatedly pursue their happiness in activities that have proven to backfire and come with high costs, is clearly not a physical disease. It’s simply a set of choices that doesn’t typically have positive outcomes and is a behavior that is not socially accepted by most people. Society has labeled such behavior as a disease for various reasons that have nothing to do with any evidence of actual physiological malfunctions that “hijack the will” of a substance

user. We recognize the difference between a true physiological disease and a metaphorical disease. This is why we offer a non-disease program that presents the facts and allows people to

harness their inner choice-making power and re-evaluate which choices may bring them the greatest amount of happiness.

To illustrate this non-disease concept more clearly, let us explore a short analogy. A person with cancer (a genuine disease) who is locked in a room for two weeks and then is set free would still have cancer. The same cannot be said for alcohol or drug users. Lock up a drinker for two weeks without booze and that person will no longer have the symptoms of alcoholism or what is now termed alcohol dependence or alcohol addiction. They may experience discomfort from detoxification, but they will not be displaying the main feature of substance use problems: i.e. substance use.

At best, physical addiction is a temporary condition akin to poisoning or an injury that happens as a result of the free choice to use substances. It naturally begins to reverse itself the moment that you choose to cease further consumption. This is unlike cancer, which usually starts on its own. Still, it is conceivable that people can make choices that increase their risk of developing cancer; such is the case with smoking and lung cancer. With respect to lung cancer, while stopping smoking is certainly a good idea, simply stopping smoking is not a

“ Just because substance users may need medical help to detoxify, this need for detoxification does not make the choice to drink and/or drug a disease. ”

cure for the disease of lung cancer. Cancer takes on a life of its own that extends far beyond the discontinuation of any personal choices that may have contributed to acquiring it. With cancer you can only hope for a radical medical intervention to cure it.

But even a need for medical help with cancer wouldn't make your previous choice of smoking a disease simply because you exposed yourself to carcinogens. Consider this: if you made the choice to walk among rattlesnakes and were bitten, you would then need to detoxify your body of the poison. The poison will make you sick and there is a chance of death if proper care is not taken. An alcohol user who requires medical detoxification has the same situation; they are poisoned. Yet, we do not automatically jump to the absurd conclusion that walking among poisonous snakes is a disease, fool hearty perhaps, but certainly not a disease. The disease proponents would then have to give the above-mentioned scenario a name like the disease of rattlesnakism! The point being, just because substance users may need medical help to detoxify, this need for detoxification does not make the choice to drink and/or drug a disease. Both sets of choices, using substances and walking among rattlesnakes, may lead to medical conditions, but, in and of themselves, are not medical conditions.

In this analogy what exactly constitutes the disease? Is it the choice to walk among rattlesnakes? Is it when a person gets bitten and is sick? Or is it when the person is taken to the hospital for poison detoxification? The answer is none. All of the above were caused by a choice, not a driving internal force beyond one's control.

Because of current treatment methodologies heavy alcohol use and/or drug use are seen as specialized and unique problems that need specialized and unique treatment. It is one of our goals throughout this program to demonstrate to you that all substance use is based on choices people make to find a moment of satisfaction and happiness. Armed with these facts, the dragon called "ism" becomes a toothless monster, one that disappears as soon as the light of the truth shines upon it. This, of course, is not to minimize the tragedy that occurs as a result of people's use of mind-altering substances. Every year thousands are killed by substance use and countless more feel the negative repercussions which have a ripple effect throughout our families, communities and country. But there is a solution available for anyone who wants it.

Temporary, self-chosen physical dependence has a defined, effective solution; detoxification. It's that simple; let's keep it that way. Mental or psychological *addiction* has been addressed throughout the many previous chapters, and is simply a chosen set of repetitive choices and behaviors that become supported by neuronal

changes in the brain. Mental or psychological *addiction* is chosen self-directed neuroplastic change. It, too, is that simple; let's keep it that way.

If you need help with the physical ramifications of choosing heavy substance use, you can go to a hospital; this much is surely a choice. Then after the choice of how to deal with some physical symptoms is made, you're left with the choice of whether you want to further pursue your happiness in heavy substance use or not.

## Important Caution

The authors of the SJP® do not tell anyone what choices they should or should not make, as we can't possibly determine what will bring happiness to anyone other than ourselves. However, we would like to offer some words of caution. If you should decide to return to drug and alcohol use after a period of abstinence, please know this: if you have detoxified and then immediately return to using substances at your previous levels, you might easily overdose and possibly die. The reason for this is that as the body adapts to life without the drug, the body's tolerance to the drug erodes. ***A dose that used to barely get you high may now kill you.*** It's important to know this and remember that your tolerance was built over time with gradually increasing doses. All drug and alcohol use is potentially dangerous, and we can recommend none of it; but we must give special attention to this danger for those who choose to resume use.

Further, some substances, especially alcohol and benzodiazepines (among many others), have the potential to lead to fatal withdrawal symptoms. We strongly recommend consulting with a physician before attempting to detoxify from any substance.

## CHAPTER 9

# Shedding the Alcoholic/Addict Identity

*"Once you label me, you negate me."*

– Soren Kierkegaard, Dutch Philosopher (1813 - 1855)

Substance use patterns result in certain benefits as well as costs and consequences. It is our intention to clear away the misinformation that surrounds the topic of controlling or moderating one's use of alcohol and/or drugs and to provide the knowledge for you to confidently move forward on whatever level of use you decide upon. With that said, we must begin this discussion with a dose of reality.

First, any use of substances can be dangerous. It is just the nature of substance use, especially if it is heavy use. Based on this simple fact, we always suggest abstaining from use for an extended period of time before a moderation approach is taken. This would be our minimum course of action should you decide to moderate your use in the future. We have seen much success with this two part approach through the decades. With some quality abstinence under your belt you can create significant self-directed neuroplastic changes in your brain that will support this newer manner of living. In short, it makes sense to have a sober state of mind and body become more "normal" to you than a drunk or high state and this takes time to create. This period of sober time also promotes enhanced decision making, clearer thinking, and improved problem solving ability. It provides you time to repair damaged relationships and proceed with your plans to create a more successful future.

The physical body once sober for several days, weeks and months, will not tolerate the same levels of substances you have historically placed in your body. **Again, this is very important to understand!** Should you resume

use to your previous high usage levels (or in some cases even lower levels of use) after a period of abstinence, then there may be a real danger of overdose or even death. Once the body detoxifies, as it does after a medical detox program or by remaining completely abstinent for a week or two, you may become intolerant to the levels you previously used. Know this before you make the choice to resume substance use even at what you might consider to be moderate levels. Better to be informed than suffer permanent damage or death. (Strang, et.al., 2003)

## The Four Factors of Experiencing Addiction

As you now know, there are four main components that create the experience erroneously called addiction. Briefly, these are:

### 1. Self-Directed Neuroplastic Change

(The "Mental or Psychological Dependency" question was covered in detail in Chapter 7.)

Because you have practiced turning to substances for happiness and comfort so often, you have trained your brain to make this thought process extremely efficient and seemingly automatic. Repeating this activity, as it is with any intense repetitive activity, your brain adjusts to make you better and faster at carrying out the repetitive activities you choose. This is why you may still find

yourself thinking of substance use even though you may have already resolved to make a change in your habits. It's important to remember though that neuroplastic processes remain in place for only as long as you decide to keep them.

At some point in your life, you put a neuroplastic process in place to support your decision to use substance(s). Today you can begin to build a new neuroplastic process to support your decision NOT to use substance(s). Let's face it; self-directed neuroplasticity is a fancy word for the learning process and how that process creates brain tissue changes. As you commit to a different set of behaviors, those neuronal connections that supported continued heavy substance use will be overwritten with new connections that support your new choices. You learn new priorities that you decide and choose to focus on. Essentially, you overwrite your beliefs in addiction, first by allowing yourself to let go of your belief in it and then replacing those old circuits with circuits that support beliefs in your internal power of free will. Remember, the mind is the boss of the brain, and with the principles of "practice makes perfect" and "use it or lose it," your thoughts and motivated beliefs will be the redefining forces that lead to meaningful change at the neuronal level.

## 2. The Need for Detoxification

(The "Physical Dependency" question was covered in the preceding chapter.)

The second factor that creates the experience of addiction is the physical ramifications that may result from extreme alcohol and/or drug use. "Physical dependency" (which is actually a toxic condition of the body, not a disease condition) is remedied through the medical detoxification process or by simply abstaining from the substance(s) for a period of time (a week or more). Simply removing the physical toxic effects of those particular drugs that have created this "physical dependency" factor (e.g. alcohol, benzodiazepines, opiates, etc.) eliminates this issue entirely. A physician can help you decide what level of medical detoxification, if any, is necessary.

## 3. Beliefs

(This topic is covered in detail in this chapter as the definitive answer to shedding a self-limiting "alcoholic" and/or "addict" self-label.)

The third factor that creates the experience of addiction is what you believe addiction to be, and how you relate to this belief. Ultimately, you know that your beliefs regarding the benefits, (i.e. happiness value) of using drugs and alcohol creates the greatest motivation for their

use. As we explained with the Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation, all human behavior is driven by the pursuit of happiness. This is where the desire and choice to use substances comes from; you believe it is a good option for acquiring personal happiness, even though the results may become painful later on. This chapter will address this issue in detail so that you can finally move past the painful consequences of substance use if that is what you wish to do.

## 4. The Cultural Connection

(This topic was touched upon in previous chapters and will also be expanded upon in the next chapter.)

The fourth factor that creates the experience of addiction is the recovery society beliefs that connect the choice to use substances with other life issues.

We call this the cultural connection because this connection is simply a cultural belief held by people in some cultures. The theory that substance use problems are caused by other problems began gaining momentum in the United States circa 1935 with the establishment of Alcoholics Anonymous, and now after nearly eighty years of pushing this agenda, the recovery society is exporting this damaging ideal to the rest of the world. Over the last eight decades it has become the defining characteristic of a growing recovery society: a victim oriented, "brain-first," Control Model approach to substance use problems.

We briefly discussed this idea of connecting normally unrelated life issues to substance use habits in Chapter 2, "Causes vs. Reasons" and we will continue to analyze this belief in the next chapter. We will, quite literally, present information on how to break the connection between substance use and other life issues so each can be addressed separately. But before you can separate substance use habits from all the other problematic areas of your life, you must first solve the question of deciding whether you are willing to shed alcoholic/addict identity.

You may have noticed we chose carefully the phrase "experience of addiction." This is not a mistake. The concept of addiction has always included, and always will include, the idea of loss of control over personal behavior and/or weakness in the face of temptation. The best research and theory available shows that there is no entity or condition that could correctly be called "addiction," as addiction is currently defined. Nevertheless, many people experience a very real feeling of weakness or powerlessness over the choice to use substances. So let us be clear that this feeling is a subjective experience and not a disease or any other sort of inherent weakness. By experience, we mean to say that, yes, you may have

wanted to use large amounts of substances frequently and, yes, you may have felt powerless to stop your substance use, but these are wants and feelings based on a certain set of beliefs and thoughts, rather than a biologically caused reality.

Powerlessness, loss of control, and stress-induced substance use are like Santa Claus; they seem very real as long as you believe in them and enough people around you do too. But as soon as you see through this folklore, the power of the myth disappears, and you stop experiencing Santa Claus and addiction. What you're left with is simply a choice just like any other and one that can be weighed like any other choice. Are the benefits of the choice to use substances worth its costs? That's the simplicity with which you can approach your substance use choices once you break the cultural connection; that is, once you disconnect it from your traumas, your depression, or any other behaviors and emotions that are a normal part of being human (and yes, depression, trauma, and anxiety, among many other unfortunate feelings and events are normal.)

Most guests complete this program primarily to make a choice about their substance use habits; not to be fixed or cured and not to learn to manage a fictitious disease, but to make a clear personal choice and follow through on them. We hope we have helped you understand that substance use is a choice, and that you can choose differently than you have in the past.

The choice to change is not a mere passing statement of intent, as you may have made in the past, and then quickly forgotten or reversed. It is about clearing out any lingering confusion, finding out exactly what you want in regards to your drinking and drug using habits, and pursuing your new choice with confidence.

As addiction is not a disease, and "loss-of-control" is a myth, all options are open to you. You can drink or drug in any manner in which you want. You always have. All are possible options, as long as they bring you the level of happiness you desire in your life, and you are willing to pay the consequences for whatever usage level you choose. And, yes, this goes for hard drugs as well. Many cultures use drugs like cocaine and heroin moderately just as people in our culture use alcohol. Many cultures, such as that in Ireland, however, view alcohol the way we view "hard drugs" and consequently struggle to moderate its use because of a belief in its "power." It really is all about beliefs within a culture about a given substance. You have always had full control over your substance use and you

always will have control over it; you, like everyone else, will always do what you really want to do.

Some of our guests may initially want to skip this chapter because they have a closed mind, but this limiting perspective may cloud your decisions, so we ask you to please read on. We will discuss the general motivational patterns behind letting go of the addict or alcoholic self-label.

## Approaching the Choice Fearlessly

The goal of abstaining completely from drugs and alcohol is a culturally acceptable goal in American society and, by and large, is seen as the only path to progress for those with substance use issues. However, the same cannot be said of the topic of using less or moderating. The recovery society's belief in loss of control, the heavy influence of 12-step beliefs and the goals of the treatment industry strongly discourage any choice but complete abstinence. Society's belief in powerlessness produces immediate debate, skepticism, and fear when the topic of reduced consumption comes up. Family members of substance users are usually the most outspoken about not wanting

this discussed at all. Family members are fearful that a choice to reduce use will cause their loved one to "go right back to getting drunk (or high) like they did before they came to the program."

“ *The recovery society then exacerbates the problem by providing excuses for the repeated broken promises: “they have a disease.” “they can’t help it;” for example.* ”

This fear is completely understandable considering the harsh price spouses, children, friends and employers have paid for the substance user's past habits. This fearful perspective has validity, since most of our guests have discussed attempting to lower their consumption levels in the past, and then failed to follow through on it, returning to behavior patterns that continue to hurt those around them. In some cases this has occurred over and over to the dismay and frustration of all involved. The recovery society then exacerbates the problem by providing excuses for the repeated broken promises: "they have a disease;" "they can't help it;" "he doesn't handle stress well and goes back to using;" "she has always buried her pain with drugs and alcohol;" "once she starts she can't stop;" "he stopped going to his therapist;" and "she has deep emotional trauma and self-medicates." The list of excuses goes on and on.

Let us examine this debate head on. The individuals described above drink and drug because they like drinking and drugging and the excuses that are offered for their

behavior are used to further justify that behavior. As time passes and the people around them continue to disagree with these substance users' choices to get drunk and high, various shaky reasons become attached to the substance use habit and become perceived causes (e.g. depression, anxiety, financial problems, marital problems, work stresses, etc.) This switch from "reasons" for one's use to "causes" for one's use develops as a means to make it emotionally easier for families to accept the relatively immature, self-destructive choices of their loved ones.

Unfortunately, if you or your loved one remains a believer in the myth of loss of control and continue to use labels such as addict or alcoholic, and also continue to make excuses for the behavior, then any effort to reduce consumption usually results in use that is reminiscent of past usage habits and sometimes even worse. It's a simple pattern: if the individual who drinks/drugs believes they are an addict or alcoholic, and they attempt to reduce their consumption, they fail because they believe that alcohol and/or drugs have power over their free will. If families continually reinforce this label and the belief that their loved one is weak, fragile, and cannot control their behaviors and choices, then that attitude has a tendency to lead to future destructive behavior patterns. Make no mistake, the reason families and friends make up these excuses or agree with the excuses substance users make, (or more accurately, the excuses that the recovery society has taught them) is to make themselves feel better. It is much easier to believe that the substance user is mentally or physiologically defective than it is to understand that their loved one freely chooses a self-destructive lifestyle.

Of course, all of this can end differently if the substance user is honest with those around them. For instance, if the substance user owns his or her habit and is outwardly honest about the desire to use heavily (instead of saying they want to moderate to make everyone around them happy), it gives those around them an opportunity to make their own decisions about the situation based on facts instead of lies. It also begins to erode the labels of addict or alcoholic because the choice to use is expressed as just that, a choice. And remember, addicts and alcoholics are not supposed to have a choice in the matter.

Furthermore, if individuals have actual facts about their substance use behavior rather than fear-based myths, it's easier to make informed decisions about future use and stick to those decisions. Still, you may wonder whether or not you are a "real addict or alcoholic." The existence of a "real addict or alcoholic" is the first myth we must address with facts in order to free you to make informed choices.

## Real Addicts and Alcoholics

Regardless of the recovery society's insistence that reducing substance use is impossible, the fact is that most people who experience substance use problems eventually move to more moderate levels of substance use or abstain entirely as they mature out of the problem, and a large percentage of those who reduce their consumption eventually end up abstaining. Countless studies have shown that most users who reduce or quit simply mature out of substance use behavior and there are many other convincing challenges to the "loss-of-control" theories:

- Epidemiological studies done by the NIAAA show that more than half of former "alcoholics" eventually use alcohol moderately. (NIH/NIAAA, 2005)

- In his book, *Addiction: A Disorder of Choice*, Dr. Gene Heyman interprets the Epidemiologic Catchment Area Study (1980 – 1984) as showing that "...by about age 37 approximately 75 percent of those who ever met the criteria for dependence were no longer reporting any symptoms." (p. 70)

- There are countless reports of heavy drug users who quit their drug of choice, and then switched to moderate levels of use of other drugs or alcohol, or still others who moderated their use of drugs in general. (Mikuriya, 2004; Epstein & Preston 2003; Reiman, 2009)

- Laboratory studies have shown that habitual drinkers drink heavily when they know they're drinking alcohol, but don't drink heavily when they're unaware that they're drinking alcohol. (Heather & Robertson, 1982)

- Other laboratory studies have shown that when you give "hardened alcoholics" incentives to drink moderately, they have no problem doing so. (Mello, 1972) The same results were found for drugs that are thought to be instantly addicting such as crack and methamphetamine. (Hart, 2013)

So really, "loss-of-control" is merely folklore and certainly not science. These unproven theories come primarily from people who've embraced the "loss-of-control" and disease theories taught to them by Control Model counselors. All people, whether labeled as addicts or not, can reduce their substance use when they want to, and they can even choose to abstain when they want to abstain. A single drink or whiff of alcohol does not

set off a chain reaction and does not have to result in disaster; only many freely chosen drinks/hits can initiate such disastrous results. Power is never lost.

Many in the recovery society write off these facts by stating that those individuals who reduce their use aren't real alcoholics (or addicts). But who exactly is a “real alcoholic or drug addict?” Often these label define anyone who arrives at a support group meeting; “you wouldn't have made it here if you weren't a real alcoholic/addict.” Other times, it's anyone who drinks/drugs alone, has a fight with someone over drinking/drugging, goes back on their promise to change, or anyone who drinks/drugs a certain amount during the week. And, the height of absurdity is that when you claim you're not one, (an alcoholic or an addict) it's seen as a sure sign that you are, and that you're in “denial” of it.

The problem with this view is that there is no stable definition for “real alcoholics and addicts”. It is telling that addiction disease proponents change their definition at will in the face of any evidence that people can regain control. Ask them what a “real addict” is, and they'll tell you that they're people who are powerless over drugs and alcohol and have many negative consequences as the result of their substance use.

Many of our former guests fit this definition perfectly before they entered the St. Jude Program®. They once felt completely powerless and felt compelled to use substances, and many even became homeless and committed crimes to persistently pursue excessive substance use; but now they no longer identify themselves by their drinking and drug using choices. When you present this to true believers in “addiction,” they'll claim that letting go of the addict/alcoholic identity can't happen. They'll further claim that the reduction in use might be good for a little while, but it won't last; or, they'll simply change the definition of a “real addict” to include the newly reduced levels of use. Push the believer far enough, and they'll essentially say that anyone who changes their habit, yet doesn't live in constant fear of “relapse” and doesn't struggle to stay sober, couldn't possibly be a “real addict or alcoholic”, regardless of how extreme their problems once were. That is, their definition denies the possibility of change by disqualifying anyone who changes as never having been a “real alcoholic or addict.”

We, of course, avoid these negative labels in this text. However, we must make sure our guests have no lingering fears that they are a “real alcoholic or addict” or even

a generic “alcoholic” or “addict” who is powerless over substances and unable to control themselves after the first drink or hit (or even before the first drink or hit). So we will provide a definition of the “real alcoholic or addict” that accurately describes the habitual condition called the “real alcoholic” or “real addict.”

Notice we said that many of our guests once felt powerless. Their experience of powerlessness was based only on their belief in powerlessness and their commitment to the immediate gratification of substance use. “Real alcoholics and addicts” include anyone who believes they are powerless over drugs and alcohol; “real alcoholics and addicts” believe they lose control with any exposure to substances; “real alcoholics and addicts” believe they must struggle for the rest of their lives. That is to say, the only “real alcoholics and addicts” are those who voluntarily take on and reinforce this negative self-image. Do you want to stay in this self-perpetuating rut or do you want to grow past it?

Since all objective data prove that people who once felt powerless can effectively reduce their levels of substance use when motivated to do so, and that those who continue to believe in powerlessness and the

disease of addiction are more likely to vacillate between the extremes of binge use and abstinence, then our description of the “real alcoholic/addict” is the only credible definition. It's your choice whether you live your life as an “addict” or “alcoholic” or not. You choose it by how you label yourself. Remember, *you are what you think*.

“

*Family members of substance users are usually the most outspoken about not wanting this discussed at all.*

”

## The CBE Approach: Thoughts First

In a nutshell, CBE is the nonjudgmental presentation of specific information and research that builds a sound approach to solving substance use problems. This curriculum illustrates how to expand your range of options about your substance use practices, and presents how to also expand your range of options concerning career, marriage, legal, emotional and other lifestyle issues.

Regarding substance use we will be discussing how to expand your options in two categories:

1. *Cognitive Options - (what you think)*
2. *Behavioral Options - (what you do)*

Some options you think about will be purely cognitive; that is, you may find new thoughts that simply help you experience events and circumstances in your life differently without any actual behavioral change. Still, behaviors come from thoughts. Thus, every behavioral option that you think of will first come from a cognitive option. This “mind-first” order is extremely important, especially for the lessons in this chapter.

If you try to use the same cognitive approach that has failed before with reducing your use, you are likely to get the same result. For example, someone who believes that they are a special type of person called an “addict” who loses control of substance use upon touching any amount of drugs or alcohol, can say “I intend to reduce my drinking/drug use,” but in holding onto the all-or-nothing disease view of addiction they’ve already doomed their behavior before they even attempt to moderate. Their thoughts sabotage their behavior to reduce their consumption.

The self-limiting, disease, powerlessness, loss-of-control beliefs of the recovery society have been shown to ruin your chances at reducing your substance consumption levels. (Brandsma, 1980; Ditman, 1967; Hester & Miller, 2002; Heyman, 2009; NIH/NIAAA, 2005; Schaler, 1995; Schaler, 2000; Sobell, et.al. 1996) A prerequisite for success with reducing consumption or abstaining is that you must accept total responsibility for the choices you have made in the past and will make in the future. You made the choice to accept instant gratification over long-term gratification in the past. You were willing to pay the price for instant gratification, and thus you have had to deal with its consequences. Own them, and then, ask yourself if you are willing to pay that price in the future. You have not been powerless, but rather, powerful and actually quite talented at keeping instant gratification in your life. Is it worth it? Is the pleasure from drinking and/or drugging worth the pain and lost motivation and time? You have not been powerless; you have always provided yourself the maximum amount of happiness you believed was at your disposal at that time. So, in truth, you have always been powerful.

Moving away from thoughts that are based in personal powerlessness is the first change to make to begin rewiring the brain’s neurons that supported your self-created “addiction beliefs.” Over the last two decades, BRI searched for methods of self-change that were proven to be effective. In this search, we found that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can create neuroplastic changes in the brain. (Beauregard, 2007; Kirsch, 2010; Crocker, et.al., 2013) For example, there have been studies comparing the effects of CBT to the use of antidepressant medications. Lowered depression rates lasted

longer in those who were treated with CBT techniques to think more effectively and cope more positively. This is important because it illustrated that those who are depressed do not necessarily need medication to build lasting stability and happiness. (Beauregard, 2007; Kirsh, 2010; Crocker, et.al, 2013) Likewise, you have control over your sphere of influence and it begins with the simple understanding that this can work for you. That’s the beginning. It is crucial for you to believe you have the personal power to achieve your substance usage goals, whatever they may be.

The goal of CBT is to create a change in thoughts and actions as a way to stave off negative emotions and behaviors. This has been proven effective for dealing with depression and other emotional problems for decades. Cognitive Behavioral Education® (or CBE®) takes the CBT process a few steps further; it removes the controlling nature of the therapeutic relationship between the therapist and the client and replaces it with nonjudgmental learning, making completion of personal changes solely the responsibility of the individual. Because CBT has been proven somewhat beneficial in the right hands, CBE®’s allowance for complete autonomy and self-awareness results in a much more self-determined set of results; assuming, of course, that you are willing to do the work. Remember, there is no therapist telling you what to think or offering advice, but CBE® offers, among other things, a process to clearly analyze and change your thoughts about what you want.

You can think whatever you like, and you will reap the rewards of your thought process. We hope that by now you know that you don’t have to think of yourself as diseased; you don’t have to think of yourself as powerless, and you don’t have to think of drugs and alcohol as having a special hold over you. If you choose to believe that alcohol is powerful and causes you to lose control, you will continue to react that way to alcohol, since behaviors are based on thoughts. But should you hold on to that thought and belief and try to implement a behavioral option that contradicts it, such as moderate use, watch out! Those who hold on to these beliefs are probably better off limiting their behavioral options regarding substance use to abstinence. Their chosen thoughts and beliefs of powerlessness leave no room for the behavioral option of reducing use.

The principle of a “thoughts first” approach can be used to help with any choice based problem, from general unhappiness and lack of direction or focus in one’s life, to eating disorders, compulsive sex and gambling problems, to name just a few. The root of these human problems is a perceived lack of other life options. When individuals become accustomed to coping with life in a

certain fixed manner (even if it is inadequate and ultimately painful) they may continue to repeat certain behaviors until they become second nature. Once a particular behavior becomes habitual, no matter how uncomfortable it may be, other more fulfilling ways of living become seemingly less possible as time passes and the habits become more deeply entrenched. The good life becomes something of a dream the further down this worn path you go. This is usually when desperation and depression become daily habits, making an already inadequate set of options become even more so. Remember, the brain will simply wire itself to accommodate repetitive thoughts, thus making it easier for people to fall prey to their own negativity.

As stated earlier, the Freedom Model® is a universal law of human motivation which states that all people have the personal right and the built-in tools to implement free thought through free choice and free will, from birth to death, and that a single drive motivates the human race: the pursuit of happiness. With Freedom Model® motivation driving you, you are providing yourself with the quickest known route to personal happiness at any given point in time; even options that may provide very little return on investment and have high negative consequences.

## A Well-Known Formula for Success

After devoting a quarter century to helping people with substance use issues we have a plethora of experience with methods of reducing consumption or abstinence that end up being quite effective, and also with methods that more typically end in painful consequences. Some of our guests get excited that they can return to drinking/drugging because we are so open to discussing the topic. The first thought for these individuals is, “Well then I am just going to bide my time here and go back to heroin/drinking! They are saying I can drink/drug safely!”

Let us address this head-on. We are not saying that anyone can ever drink or use drugs safely. We could never claim to know the consequence of anyone’s personal drinking or drugging habits, and therefore would never recommend such risky behavior. Any drinking or drugging has certain consequences both good and bad, and in light of this reality, *we always advocate abstinence first (even in cases where you may want to reduce consumption down the road)*. We have had great experience with the abstinence first approach. By allowing yourself a good amount of time (minimally months, preferably years) with abstinence, you automatically begin the self-directed neuroplastic changes to your brain tissue that are necessary to support more clear, goal oriented thinking

and acting. This is a fact. We have seen people move on to dramatic changes in lifestyle that brought immense success because they gave themselves enough time to readjust their priorities by being abstinent for a substantial amount of time before they returned to some moderate level of use. The following statement is typical:

“Once I made the decision to quit drinking, the drinking was no longer central to my way of thinking or acting anymore. It was a simple decision backed up with the research that “addiction” is a belief. I decided to stop believing I was under the spell of alcohol. Yeah, I drink occasionally now, but it is not the focus of who I am. As a matter of fact, I don’t think about it at all.”

These simple sentences get to the heart of the matter. It is a matter of proportion. As people grow in age and maturity, they naturally gain a wider perspective on life. Things that once seemed so large or important (such as beliefs in powerlessness, etc.) become much less so. This is the case with all people who live long enough to gain this larger perspective and have the willingness to adapt and change.

So we see all options for substance use, across the entire spectrum, as potentials for success, because that is what you may freely choose, especially after you abandon the specialness of an “addict” or “alcoholic” self-label. Our CBE® non-judgment does not allow us to judge what is right for you. That must remain your decision and you will own the consequences of those decisions. But, we can, if you want, advocate what has brought less pain and more success for others through the years and pass that information on to you as possibilities. An abstinence approach, or an abstinence approach coupled with reduced consumption down the line have brought many of our past guests wonderful, life changing possibilities that they could not have created for themselves if they continued down the path of heavy substance use. We hope you take our experience and research to heart, as heavy use is sad to see when it eventually leads to misery or worse.

In summary, before we move on to the next chapter, we must be crystal clear in repeating that all options of substance use are available to you if you can truly shed the “addict” or “alcoholic” identity. So we must now ask you; are you worth more than what you have provided yourself in the past? Are you willing to believe in personal power over powerlessness? Are you a fully capable “mind-first” individual, with free will and a desire for a happier life? Are you willing to shed the “addict” or “alcoholic”

identity, and become an empowered person capable of running your own life in a more productive way?

Remember that as long as you hold on to the possibility that you may be unable to control yourself, (that you are a “brain-first” individual) this thought process will nag at you and undermine your efforts to change; even when choosing abstinence. With a belief in yourself as a freely acting person, you can choose to use substances (or not use substances) in a manner that brings you a happier existence, whatever that may be. Furthermore, and in

any case, you will do exactly what you want to do.

In order to get the best results, it’s now a matter of clearly understanding what you want, and then building the motivation to make it happen. You are worth more than instant gratification and the limited results that lifestyle produces. In the following chapter you will learn how to fully internalize this truth by making sure you keep your substance use question separate from all the other lifestyle and emotional issues, thus creating a much more capable problem solving skill set.

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## CHAPTER 10

# Breaking the Cultural Connection

*“What would you do if you weren’t afraid?”*

– Dr. Spencer Johnson, American author

Do you still believe that there are underlying causes for your addiction? If so, that is because you have been taught this idea through the media, therapists, the treatment industry, etc. that are all parts of the overly complex recovery society in which we all live. Unfortunately a belief is as strong as fact to the believer. If you believe that there are causes for your substance use, well then, there are. But, it does not have to remain that way.

Let us start this chapter with the following direct statement: no one here is saying you do not have emotional issues, career issues, possible mental health issues, etc. Nor are we saying that a connection between depression, low self-esteem, and other “underlying causes for your addiction” are not real for you at *this moment*. Being human and being from a recovery society culture that teaches this connection from birth makes this culturally connected belief system quite real. You may fall victim to the belief that your “addictions” are fueled by other, more complex life problems such as depression or a past trauma and the like. We understand this concept because many of us believed our substance use problems could only go away if we became happier and the other issues of life were better addressed. Unfortunately, we found that this belief is fraught with certain pitfalls.

## Trying to Avoid the Unavoidable

Life is fluid, and unforeseen traumas, disease, financial struggles, etc. are a natural part of life no matter who you

are; sober or not. No one on earth is exempt from misery and unhappy days, now and in the future. If you keep the cultural connection attached, that is to say, that you can only be “addiction free” if you are stress free, anger free, or trauma free, then you are certain to always need a shield from life’s normal challenges, and that is impossible.

Attempting to avoid life’s troubles, hoping that this will somehow help you to sidestep substance use, is a surefire way to remain stuck, sad, unproductive, and lost. Over time, you will find it impossible anyway, as no one can hide from life’s normal difficulties, forever. Just observe those who hide from life by attending support group meetings and ongoing group therapy if you want a firsthand account of how ineffective this belief system is. You will be hard pressed to find a more frightened and insecure bunch of people than those who attempt to hide from life. There is a much better way.

## Break the Chains of this Limiting Belief

The process of separating your substance use habits from the personal reasons you use to justify it does not have to be difficult. With that said, the more sold you are on the idea that substance use is caused by other life factors, the more difficult it may seem. Unplugging this connection is a tough idea for those who constantly discuss the connection as fact. How many times do you hear statements made that support this idea; things like,

“He just lost his mother in a tragic accident, and he’s been drinking ever since.” In this case the trauma equals drinking to excess. As this idea takes hold, it becomes a very real momentary experience to substance users that the alcohol or drug is relieving their emotional pain; and worse, if they’re in too deep, they fully believe that the pain actually causes them to drink or “self-medicate.”

When our guests are willing to look at their drinking and drug using habits as distinct issues and then separately address their other life issues, they have broken the connection. However, some report they have a different fear. They are afraid that the program will minimize the other problems with which they are struggling such as anger, depression and anxiety. Let us be clear, this is absolutely not the case. We take those issues very seriously and by separating substance use issues from other mental and emotional issues like those listed above; each is then able to be addressed with amazing singular clarity and effectiveness. Know that the entire last two thirds of this text and workbook address these life issues in detail. But unlike every treatment program in the nation, we will not be tying them to your substance use problem. *You will have already addressed that issue entirely.*

All of us at St. Jude’s understand that you have been taught that your life issues are the “underlying causes for your addiction.” Because that statement is based on a cultural belief, it has become true for millions. You might be one of them.

But let’s free you from that *belief* system right away! Let’s empower you with facts that refute this connection! Let’s provide you the reality that substances have no power and therefore you have full control over them! Let’s engage in a process that allows you to control both substance use issues and life issues independently and with great care! The process outlined in the workbook is the method you will use to separate your substance use problems from your other life issues. It is an incredibly simple, but very illuminating, exercise.

We here at BRI researched how successful guests achieved their varied substance use goals. Fundamentally we found that those people who know they have control over their consumption levels do so *regardless of the stability of their lives*. Many millions of people live in extremely violent and oppressive environments, steeped in poverty and crime, yet they do not use, or they use with total control. If ever there were groups of people

who should be using heavily (according to the “addiction professionals”) it would seem that these groups would fit the bill. Yet, they live their lives with quiet dignity, strength, and an ability to overcome their life struggles without substances being factored in at all.

It should be noted that none of these cultures have a recovery society influence and the belief that stress (or anger, or anxiety, etc.) causes substance use does not exist. Millions throughout the world struggle with depression and anxiety, they have careers they dislike, or have bad marriages, etc., and they do not have substance use issues. Why? Simply because they did not connect these normal lifestyle struggles with choices they were making in regards to their substance use. This connection doesn’t occur to them because it was never taught to them. They literally don’t connect substance use with these other challenges that are present in their lives.

***The connection is only a matter of belief in it. You can now let this belief go.***

Are you ready to simplify that which may have baffled you so far? **Are you willing to separate these culturally connected items?** If so, complete the process of breaking the cultural connection as laid out in the following workbook lessons, and destroy the idea that you have underlying causes for “addiction.” Let go of the influence of the recovery society that has created such an unnecessary, complicated mess. Finally gain some real control of your life.

After you complete the exercises in the workbook for this chapter, you can move forward to the second and third modules of this program that deal strictly with life issues rather than both the substance use issue and life issues glued together. The substance use issue is put in its proper place by two very important factors: 1. By shedding the “alcoholic” or “addict” identity; and 2. by separating life issues from your choices to use substances.

We hope you are excited to move forward! You are a powerful, driven, and wonderful person and you are capable of achieving much happiness once you understand the path to get there. *Workbook #2, Axiom-Based Self-Analysis*, will provide the necessary foundation on which you can build a new future.

It’s now time for you to move forward and learn how you can deal with and overcome life’s struggles and achieve a satisfying and happy life!

## CHAPTER 11

# Axiom Based Self Analysis Introduction

*“You can’t get there by bus, only by hard work and risk and by not quite knowing what you’re doing. What you’ll discover will be wonderful. What you’ll discover will be yourself.”*

– Alan Alda, Actor

And now for the truly unique and illuminating module of the Saint Jude Program, Module 2: Axiom-Based Self-Analysis, which we call ABSA. It is during this Module that you will become fully self-aware. So many people move through life in a trance-like, reactionary state. They develop ways of thinking, behaviors, and habits, and they are never really sure why. People use alcohol and drugs for a variety of reasons. In ABSA, you will explore the reasons you may have used to justify your ongoing substance use in spite of some unpleasant or inconvenient consequences. However, it’s important to understand that ABSA is not really about substance use at all. It’s designed for you to learn about you. What motivates you? What de-motivates you? What are your passions and desires? What do you hate? What do you love? What do you fear? What makes you tick? What patterns of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors have you developed and are they a benefit or a detriment to you?

But please don’t be confused-- ABSA is not about exposing your skeletons or “working through” past trauma or issues. There is no psychoanalysis or therapy involved. Certainly if there are things you wish to “work through” while you are here, the program can help you to do that, but working through your past issues is not required for you to stop or moderate your substance use. During the last module you learned about the cultural connection and the consequences of holding on to that belief system. ABSA will take you through a process to practically apply the knowledge you gained in Module

1 and further solidify your personal power to overcome your struggles and make lasting changes.

Don’t be concerned if you have deep, dark secrets you do not want to reveal. Contrary to what you may have heard, you are NOT as sick as your secrets. Everyone has secrets, even highly successful people who have never struggled with substance use problems. Everyone has made choices in life they’ve regretted. Those who are most successful make the conscious decision to learn from their mistakes and experiences, leave them in the past, and move on with their lives gaining wisdom from each of them. You will not be asked to reveal any of your secrets to anyone, so there is no need for any anxiety.

Unlike those programs that force you to expel your “demons” and dredge up your traumas as a means to “work through them”, the purpose of ABSA is for you to gain knowledge, to see the choices you’ve made, and the path you’ve willingly, if not knowingly, taken to get where you are today. The purpose of ABSA is for you to become fully self-aware. That self-awareness is the key to becoming the person you truly want to be and going in a direction that you truly want to go.

Those who take responsibility for their past and their present circumstances have ultimate control over their future. Those who can identify their past decisions that have led to negative consequences and behaviors that have brought about undesired results tap into a personal power to change their future.

When wrapped up in the mire of problem drinking or drugging where you feel completely helpless and out of control, you may have a nihilistic perspective that is all or nothing. Often times when people are struggling emotionally, they will focus on all of the bad they perceive in their lives and become overwhelmed by their problems. Their thoughts are consumed by the negative. This can completely block out any hope for a positive future. That is why the exercises in ABSA ask you to look at the positive in your life as well. What have you accomplished? What are your talents and where have you been successful?

If you've been through counseling, treatment programs or have experience in a 12 step program you know firsthand how those methods actually magnify feelings of failure and helplessness. Consider the skilled surgeon who lost his license due to opiate use. He loved his career, he loved caring for his patients, and facing the loss of that is personally devastating to him. He feels like a complete failure. When he is sent to treatment he hopes that he will be able to regain his personal strength and solve his opiate problem. Instead he is told that he is selfish, self-centered, egotistical, powerless, and weak. While he has devoted his life to helping people at a great personal expense, and has saved countless lives with his talents and skills, he is told that's irrelevant and that he must focus only on the negative aspects of himself the therapist or sponsor has identified.

Do not confuse ABSA for that kind of self-deprecating exercise. The purpose of ABSA is not for you to beat yourself up over your past transgressions. It is definitely not for you to create a listing of your sins and character flaws so you can go to confession. This module will not only help you to identify problem areas in your life, but will also highlight your great successes. Everyone has talents, wonderful traits and areas of their lives where they have achieved success. Many people, like the surgeon above, have been very successful but may struggle in just one or two areas. Some of our guests have been struggling for so long they have forgotten the many successes they have experienced or they think of those successes as in the distant past, never to be experienced again. The purpose of ABSA is to help you to gain a truly accurate picture of your entire being, from the great parts of yourself that work well to those things about you that you know you want to change.

### **Axioms: Life's Simple Wisdoms**

Through decades of scholarly research and life experience, we have found many nuggets of truth that are universal. These truth nuggets are quite simple yet incredibly valuable. We have seen that too often people choose to live in opposition to them which can cause

great discomfort, and, in some cases, horrible pain and suffering. These truths are not moralistic, nor are they religious in nature. Instead, they are laws of the universe that exist for everyone. While there are many universal truths, for the purposes of this analysis, we have chosen the five that seem to be most crucial. We have found that many who struggle with substance use problems, as well as other emotional and behavioral problems, are often living out of sync with some or all of these five axioms. The purpose of the Axiom-Based Self-Analysis (ABSA) is to have you look at your life experiences, your choices, patterns, thoughts, and habits to measure them against these five axioms. This process can be quite illuminating and will help you to see the paths you have taken to get where you are today.

To help make the nature of the Five Universal Axioms clear, let's briefly look at the physical law of the universe: gravity. All people are subject to the law of gravity every day of their lives, wherever they go, whether they realize it or not. Each person can understand, embrace, and benefit from the law of gravity. There are people who use gravity to improve their strength by lifting weights. There are those who use it for fun and excitement by sky diving, jumping on a trampoline, or sliding down a water slide. Then there are those who don't acknowledge gravity or who make choices not in conjunction with gravity and face the consequences of those choices. Stacking fine china on a rickety old table that is unsteady or trying to jump a dump truck loaded with gravel over a row of cars would be good examples of choices made that are incongruent with the law of gravity and both can make quite a mess! The axioms we'll be discussing are similar in nature to gravity: they are unchangeable, principle based, and therefore available for your productive or unproductive use.

These axioms are cast in stone; in other words no matter how much you try, the axioms cannot be manipulated or changed in any way. This fact is very important. Many individuals, being unfamiliar with these laws, wonder why their lives have been so difficult. They do not realize that they are in a constant state of decision making that runs counter to the axioms, and consequently they find life dissatisfying, troublesome and exhausting. It does not have to be this way. All five axioms, when understood and acted upon, bring a greater level of satisfaction and fulfillment to the human experience.

The axioms can be seen as gifts with which you can work to achieve great results or they can be viewed as curses that you must continuously work against. How you view them is completely up to you. Your free-will allows for both productive use and counterproductive use of each principle.

Our goal here is to clarify what the axioms are and how you can most benefit from a thorough understanding of them. We are introducing the axioms at this point in the program for several reasons. First, since you already have some life experience it makes sense for you to gauge how effectively you have used these axioms in the past; probably without even knowing you did so. Because of a basic lack of understanding of these axioms many of our guests were unable to realize the vast benefits that can come from using the axioms effectively. Consequently many of our guests have struggled and led unfulfilling lives and experienced ongoing frustrations, depression and chaos. It is our mission to help you to escape this seemingly random pattern and to learn how the laws of the universe can work to your benefit which will enable you to then use them to achieve ultimate happiness and life fulfillment.

Please understand that it is not the goal of this program to moralistically impose values upon you. The axioms are truths of how life works, but they contain no specific content about what you should or shouldn't do or value. These axioms cannot be culturally swayed by human moral values and/or beliefs. Personal opinions, beliefs, moral codes and values all change with time, place and culture, while the axioms remain constant, everywhere, forever.

Human experiences and the axioms are inseparable. No matter how hard you try, you cannot avoid the fact that the universe is structured with these principles as its building blocks. That is good news, because it means we, as the authors and program presenters, cannot manipulate the axioms; time and history have already proven their unwavering truth and inherent value. All people live under the same unchangeable principles. Each person decides what they value in life and what they will pursue; and each person can use the axioms to help them achieve the life they want.

It's necessary to fully understand the axioms so that the self-analysis process can have the most beneficial outcome for you. These chapters bring together knowledge of the axioms and apply them as you create your axiom-based self-analysis. As you analyze your life experiences, you will see how you may have been operating in conjunction with the axioms or in conflict with them. By comparing your life experiences to the axioms, you will gain powerful insights as to why you have had both fulfilling and unfulfilling results in your life. More importantly, by gaining a comprehensive understanding of the axioms, you will be able to make your future life experiences much more fulfilling and personally satisfying.

## The Five Universal Axioms are:

1. **Change is constant.**
2. **You are what you think.**
3. **Happiness is the only cognitive motivator in the human condition.**
4. **There is no shortcut to sustainable, stable, long-term happiness.**
5. **Your happiness is in your hands.**

Many of our guests expect a deep, philosophical, complicated series of principles when they begin reading this chapter. Some have even stated how they were intimidated at the beginning of this discussion, and were worried that this chapter was going to entail deep religious or spiritual principles or dogma, or espouse rules based in morality. When faced with the axioms, many are struck with their sheer simplicity. The fact is truth is almost always self-evident and rooted in common sense and logic. It is usually quite practical and these axioms are no exception.

These are concepts you may have heard before but never really thought much about. Most people know that **change is constant**. They have experienced it personally and have watched it happen around them. But did you ever stop and think about what happens when you try to keep a situation exactly the same? Think about your relationships for moment. As you've aged hopefully your relationship with your parent(s) has changed and matured. People often want to keep romantic relationships in that "new love" state forever, but all romantic relationships go through very predictable stages and if couples stick it out, they settle into something that is less exciting and much more comfortable. Think of areas in your life where you fought change; where you wanted things to stay exactly the same. What were your results? In ABSA you will gain this knowledge about yourself.

If you accept that axiom number two is true, **you are what you think**, this truth will have very little value to you without applying it to your everyday life. You might intellectually say to yourself, 'yes that makes sense' and leave it at that. But to build positive outcomes from the axiom you must learn how to apply it in your life. The ABSA exercises will provide lessons to help you to become fully aware of your thoughts. **If you are what you think** then you must become fully aware of and responsible for, what you think. Only then will this axiom begin to have value to you.

In Module 1 you may remember the discussions about powerlessness. This is a great example of this axiom. If you think or believe that you are powerless, then you are or if you think or believe that you are powerful, then you are. By becoming aware of your thoughts and how they affect you as a person, you can then guide your thoughts, your decisions and your behaviors, and thus you have a tool to control and guide your life to much more positive outcomes. Have you ever noticed a time when you were fearful that something bad would happen and it did? Perhaps you ruminated on a specific worry such losing your job and you lost your job. Or you woke up tired or unhappy and one bad thing after another happened to you throughout the day. While your misfortune may have seemed random and completely unfair, through ABSA you will begin to see a pattern where much of what may have seemed like bad luck was actually within your ability to control all along.

The third axiom that ***happiness is the only cognitive motivator*** has brought about many insightful and thought provoking discussions both in and out of the classroom. We encourage guests to challenge it both in their own minds as well as with their presenters and other program staff. Axioms four and five may not be self-evident to you now, but will come into focus quite clearly as you proceed through the following chapters and work through the exercises in this module.

The difficulty with truth is it requires an open mind and a willingness to explore possibilities that may be outside of your current beliefs. The nature of personal change is that it requires a certain level of commitment and work along with taking responsibility to create positive outcomes. It is our experience that simply knowing these axioms will not change anything for you. For them to

have any value in your life, you must work at applying them daily. The remainder of this program will provide you with the information you need to apply these axioms to your daily life. You will work through practical lessons contained in this module and also in the Life Movements module and the accompanying workbook.

As you proceed, we understand that you may have some anxiety, especially if you have been through any kind of treatment, counseling, or the 12 Steps prior to coming to this program. Unlike those methods, this process is not supposed to be painful; instead, it should be illuminating and freeing for you. Our mission is to present to you how you can apply these axioms in your daily life, allowing you to become an empowered, self-aware individual. Your ultimate goal in this process is to gain a clear understanding of yourself, your motivations, and exactly how you have arrived at the point you are today.

While it is true this process may bring up past experiences that may have been painful for you, it is important for you to keep in mind your goal in this process: to learn about your patterns of thought and behavior. Instead of focusing on the painful experience itself, look at the events leading up to it and/or your thoughts, behaviors, and reactions following it as a means to gain self-knowledge. You may even find that you have a whole different perspective on the situation. We ask that you put your trust in the process and know that our program staff is here to help you every step of the way. You really do have the strength, courage, and ability to take complete control over your life and build the life you want. This process will truly be life changing for you should you decide to apply what you learn!

## CHAPTER 12

# The Universal Axioms One and Two

*“Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change.”*

– Stephen Hawking, English theoretical physicist

### 1. Change is constant.

### 2. You are what you think.

Axioms Number One and Number Two will be discussed together because they directly and indirectly affect each other. As we noted throughout the earlier discussion on neuroplasticity, the brain and the body only do what the mind tells them to do. For instance, you don't feed yourself until the mind thinks to eat and then your mind tells the brain to set in motion the movements necessary to eat.

How you exist in the universe is totally dependent on your mind. In other words, your thoughts drive your life. Hence, Axiom Number Two is defined: you are what you think. The ability to think and guide your experiences through the power of free will is astounding, as it puts you (i.e. the essence of you, your mind) in the driver's seat. Because free will allows people to be reactive and proactive, it gives them the capacity to avoid the potential for much suffering in this constantly changing universe. Axiom Number One, change is constant; makes for a potential minefield of sorrow should you decide not to make use of your thinking ability to adapt and create your own happiness.

Still, there are some life situations over which people have little or no control, such as natural disasters or the death of a loved one. However, all people do have control over how they react. You also have a tremendous amount of control over what you learn from past situations and how you proceed with your life so as not to repeat past

unwanted patterns and choices. This is known as being proactive, rather than reactive.

This program is based on common sense and is designed to show you that every time you make a choice, something happens, either in an expansive gratifying direction or in a self-limiting, unfulfilling direction. This program can guide you toward choosing your options with confidence rather than believing yourself to be a victim of circumstance. The goal of the program is for you to take control of your life and live in sync with universal truths that will enlighten and motivate you, as never before.

### Immaturity

It is essential that you understand that you are the master of all of the choices you have made in life and all the choices you will ever make. Those who believe they are victims of circumstance are choosing to remain in a more immature state. Now then, we understand that the word “immature” conjures up many negative visions of temper tantrums and other poor behaviors, and you may find it insulting. Based on this understanding, you may reject that it applies to you. However, for the purposes of this program our definition of immaturity is simply an arrested development in some area(s) of life. Put another way, immaturity is a state of remaining “unchanged.” As you know, Axiom Number One states that change is constant. Being that this is an irrefutable fact, when an individual

decides not to adapt to changes happening around them, he or she is attempting to ignore the inevitable. Logically, trying to avoid the unavoidable is a scenario that can only end in frustration and continuous stress.

So as we discuss “immaturity,” we are specifically discussing behaviors that attempt to escape from adapting and changing one’s lifestyle in response to naturally occurring and unavoidable life challenges and patterns of change. Specifically, we are not defining immaturity as a measure of chronological age. In short, immaturity is defined as side-stepping personal changes that could create greater fulfillment had the changes been made. Adapting to life’s struggles and challenges is an obvious quality of maturation.

There are many who are competent in their chosen profession; there are those who are highly intelligent, and people who have wonderfully effective communication skills. There are guests who attend our program who have many areas of their life already figured out; they have matured in these areas. In the truest sense, they are satisfied with these areas of their lives. But these same individuals may have other areas of their lives that remain in an immature, or static, state, which reduces their overall quality of life. How many times have you said, “God, I feel so lost” or “I feel stuck and without purpose.” Statements like these point to areas of life that have remained stagnant while the rest of the universe moved forward without you.

The contrast between your life and the lives of those around you who are happier and more satisfied may be glaring. Maybe you have held onto resentments from childhood or you have intimate relationships that are unfulfilling and you feel a sense of hopelessness. Or perhaps you feel like you are devoid of purpose. In these areas your emotional development has stagnated or in some cases maybe even regressed.

Please understand that we are not judging you when we say this; we are simply describing some states of being that are unfulfilling. If you avoid change, it’s as if you’re placing yourself in front of a moving bus. Life, like the bus, will not stop moving, progressing, and rolling forward. Should you decide to remain steadfast in your views of the world and refuse to adapt and grow with it; the bus will eventually roll right over you! Is it possible that your frustration and unfulfilled states are indicators that you might be acting in a manner that is contrary to the laws of the universe?

“

*The cause of most unhappiness is usually quite simple.*

”

Most adult emotional development occurs during the adolescent and young adult years. The learning curve is steep during these times. But this does not mean it stops there. Many people in their senior years continue to develop. Unfortunately, there are people who don’t their behaviors as they hit each stage of life. They try to hang onto old behaviors that do not seem to bring the same level of satisfaction that they once did. A man at age 70 may find the activities he did at age 50 have become unpleasant or uninteresting. That is simply how life works. To continue to be fulfilled and happy, that 70 year old seek can out new activities and set new goals. And, it is no different for individuals at 20, 30, or 40 years of age. What once brought fantastic happiness

just years before may become boring or downright uncomfortable later in life. You can either adapt to change or slowly die inside. Whatever age you are, a lack of maturity (i.e. unwillingness to adapt to life’s changes) develops into a constant state of disappointment and a sense of despair. Doesn’t it make sense to learn how to address those aspects of your life that seem to be at a standstill? Isn’t it time to enjoy the immense benefits of maturing in all areas of life?

In addition to knowing that the world around you is in a constant state of change as Axiom Number One states, Axiom Number Two provides the answer to adapting and overcoming the more difficult aspects of change. This is great news, because your power of thought is the guiding light you will use to navigate the constantly shifting seas of change. You are what you think! Think differently and you will get different results’ the principles of the universe enable you to choose whatever life you want. There are no cosmic powers in the universe relegating you to some predestined life. Your life is where it is today because you have made all the choices necessary to get you right here. But of even greater importance is that if you are not happy with your life as it is today, you can change it to whatever you want it to be; you have choices.

Knowing that change is unavoidable and that certain areas of your life may have become stagnant, unfulfilling and self-limiting, perhaps it’s time to analyze what you think about on a daily basis so you can understand why you are the person you have become, and why you may be stuck in certain behavior patterns? Why have you limited your progress and remained in an immature state in certain areas of your life? Why have you avoided necessary changes in your life? And, what do you spend your time thinking about?

The cause of most unhappiness is usually quite simple. It stems from an unwillingness to observe and accept the fact that you are what you think, and second, an unwillingness to accept responsibility for your own thoughts, choices and actions. This means that to create self-change you will have to face and overcome many challenges in life. Challenges such as deferring gratification for benefits that are much more satisfying down the road, may seem difficult to you right now, but this process will help put everything in perspective. Throughout this process you will be able to identify those challenges and be able to tackle them individually.

You can produce positive change on a consistent basis only if you are aware of what your thoughts are. By analyzing your perception of the world you are able not only to adapt to change in a reactive manner, but you will also begin to form a positive set of circumstances around you by being proactive. Creating a proactive manner of thinking, rather than remaining primarily reactive will produce enormous benefits. For example, by understanding that you are a fearful person (if this is the case), you can then create proactive strategies to take risks and conquer your fears today and in the future. Sure, you can continue to wait for bad things to happen, or you can wait for good fortune to smile upon you, but wouldn't it be more effective to write your own future?

If you never spend the time to examine your thoughts, you will not be able to make mental and emotional adjustments that are needed to overcome your problems. You will stay stuck, and your fears will continue to grow larger keeping you trapped in an underdeveloped state of immaturity.

By understanding your thoughts and how you react to difficult situations, you can then build more effective strategies for future situations. Should you react to these events and changes more productively, each event will result in less self-limiting and less painful outcomes. Analyzing and changing your thought patterns when challenged by life changes (such as a car accident, sickness, loss of a job, divorce, aging, etc.) is an exercise that is guaranteed to limit pain and suffering. This use of Axiom Number Two is a reactive use; you are essentially analyzing your thoughts when circumstances beyond your immediate control land in your lap. Then you adjust your thoughts to provide swift, positive, problem solving perspectives to circumstances that used to drag you down emotionally or freeze you in fear.

Axiom Number Two's second principle is a process of

creating proactive thoughts that guide your future to more fulfilling outcomes. You are literally creating scenarios in your mind that can avert much of the misery you currently (and in the past) created for yourself. By understanding your thoughts, you can use that knowledge to become a much more proactive person. The benefits of applying Axiom Number Two cannot be overstated. By becoming aware of your thoughts and how you perceive the world, you are able to shape your future. By thinking positively, and in more courageous terms, you actually become more positive and avail yourself to more positive outcomes.

This axiom needs to be practiced immediately, so we recommend that you begin building the habit of analyzing your thoughts now. This skill will need to be in place by the time you get to Workbook Number Three so that goal setting can have maximum, positive, long-term effects on your life. Being proactively positive, and knowing that you are the master of your future, provide for some wonderful outcomes. By deciding to be positive, courageous, and a problem solver, rather than a fearful, stagnant person, you build a life that you design. Up to now you have lived with the results of your undisciplined thoughts; are you getting the results you wanted or hoped for?

Both reactive and proactive classifications for analyzing your thoughts will produce extraordinary outcomes. Should you be willing to analyze your thoughts and have a willingness to see your current circumstances in a more positive light, you will then begin the process of creating your new life. This change in perspective is the foundation of all axiom-

based lifestyles. Are you ready to embrace change? Are you ready to look at the world in a different way? Are you ready to problem-solve?

People sometimes unknowingly create self-defeatist attitudes and feel trapped. It is not that they consciously want to hurt themselves; they simply spend time doing things they find makes them happy for the least effort expended and the fastest way possible. This is like a child in a room full of toys who goes from one toy to another until he becomes exhausted, bored, and unhappy. Or like the child who on Halloween eats all her candy in one night regardless of the warnings from those who know better.

A bored or unhappy person naturally seeks relief and happiness. The immature person usually seeks relief via the quickest route (immediate gratification). This can have some temporary positive results, but is usually followed by a sense of loss, sickness and hopelessness

“ *By understanding your thoughts, you can use that knowledge to become a much more proactive person.* ”

when the temporary happiness fades as quickly as it came. That sense of loss creates a greater need for more quick fixes and so the self-destructive roller coaster keeps going. Instant gratification, rather than mature deferred gratification, leaves a person wanting more, always more. It is time to ask yourself; am I ready to get off this roller coaster? Am I ready to find greater purpose and build a new life?

Happiness, whether it is short-lived (instant gratification) or long term (deferred gratification), is the one universal

goal people seek throughout their lives. The important question is always this: is what you are doing working for you? Are you truly satisfied and happy? Take a moment and answer that question to yourself.

If the answer is no, then you might want to carefully and thoroughly examine your thoughts. This is the very beginning of the process of self-change. As you practice the art of self-reflection and begin to understand how powerful your thoughts are in guiding your very existence, then and only then can we move forward.

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## CHAPTER 13

# Universal Axioms Three & Four

*“People who believe they cause good things tend to like themselves better than people who believe good things come from other people or circumstances.”*

– Martin Seligman, American psychologist and author (b. 1942)

In this chapter we will examine the process of attaining fulfillment through the analysis of two life factors. The first factor is the topic of personal satisfaction and how this relates to happiness. The second factor you will explore is expanding your list of options as they relate to the natural challenges and opportunities life presents on a daily basis. And, of course, these discussions will naturally dovetail into a comprehensive explanation of Axiom Number Three, *happiness is the only cognitive motivator in the human condition* and Axiom Number Four, *there is no shortcut to sustainable, stable, long-term happiness*.

### Satisfaction, a Metric for Happiness

As you know, the Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation states that individuals always move in the direction of what makes them happy at any given point in time. However, and this is essential to understand: *the value of happiness gained from your choices is not the same for every choice you make*. Some choices produce happiness with higher satisfaction levels than other choices. The level of satisfaction gleaned from each choice determines to a certain extent how fulfilled people are as individuals. Let's look at an example.

As a child, you dreamed of receiving presents on Christmas morning, a birthday, or any other number of special occasions. You may have dreamed about the

gifts, the food, and the fun. If you're like most kids, for a month leading up to the event your anticipation was almost palpable. Yet, the day after the event was over, you would feel letdown, a subtle sense of, 'ahh, it's over.' The *satisfaction level* for this occasion was low because once it was over, you were left wanting more. As you look back now on how you felt after Christmas, it becomes apparent that the presents were somewhat of a temporary, hollow victory. In much the same way, items, events or choices that are fleeting, or are instant gratification based, tend to rate low on a satisfaction scale because they do little to truly satisfy for any extended period of time. These instant gratification choices do produce happiness, but the quality or the value of the happiness is temporary, somewhat dissatisfying, and leaves you wanting more. Typical examples of this lower level of happiness are any choice that when observed after the fact provides this temporary satisfaction quality. Choices such as shopping, drinking, drug using, expedient sex, superficial relationships and gambling are just a few examples that provide lower satisfaction happiness values.

You may be thinking, then what would rate high in satisfaction? This can be more difficult to answer because those choices and activities that have real lasting effects are quite personal in nature. Any relationship that is based in deep love will provide a high level of consistent satisfaction, and therefore higher level happiness. Many choices or options that demand deferring gratification for some period of time and also require effort to complete

usually carry a higher level of satisfaction. This is also true of activities and choices that produce long term positive effects; such as building a beautiful home that you will live in for decades. It is up to each person to determine what will provide the deepest observable satisfaction, and that satisfaction is the defining characteristic of *what kind* or what value is built into your feelings of happiness. Make no mistake; it is not a question of whether you are striving for happiness, because every choice you have ever made in your life was designed to do just that. Rather, it is a question of the *quality* or, put another way, the value of happiness you want. Will you choose fleeting and ultimately dissatisfying options for happiness, or will you choose options that have great, lasting satisfaction associated with them?

## Seeking Relief – Low Value Happiness

To help you to gain an understanding of the value of happiness that can be attained, we will present a few examples to you.

This particular individual is frustrated, bored and generally unfulfilled and unsatisfied with life. He consistently seeks relief from his current unsatisfied state because he perceives his options are limited and he sees quick fixes as the go-to solution to his complex problems. He perceives the availability of long-term solution-based options as being in short supply for the simple reason that his comfort zone may be too confining or he is unwilling to do the work necessary to complete such options. Maybe this individual has many options that would solve his unsatisfactory state of being, but he is unwilling to attempt any personal change at this point. Long-term solutions to life's issues demand change, work, and dedication. Seeking quick, relief-based solutions always seems easier. Over time and with practice more expedient methods of addressing painful situations become the preferred method. Consequently, these individuals take the shortcut to happiness by grabbing whatever makes them feel better the quickest way possible at every difficult moment in life.

With so many resources being devoted to seeking instant relief few truly rewarding pathways leading out of their current unsatisfied state are ever found or created. Consequently, these people continue their search for relief over and over, usually in vain. These quick fix solutions could include going from one unfulfilling relationship to another, drinking and drugging episodes that never seem to measure up, education or career fits and stops, etc. This seeking relief from pain is, of course, a simplistic, expedient, reactionary form of temporary happiness that produces low level satisfaction for the effort expended.

If you live in a condition where you are unwilling to change your current circumstances for something better your life naturally becomes a series of reactions to unfortunate or negative circumstances. In reacting you will frantically grab whatever scraps of happiness can be found at that moment, no matter how unsatisfying those choices may be in the long run. For some people, temporary relief from boredom and frustration becomes the definition of their happiness. This reactive escape-from-pain mentality, while still a form of happiness, is a short-sighted, unsatisfying version of it. Many who read this will understand this statement all too well; hence the reason that seeking relief from pain sits quite low on the happiness value scale; very little long-term satisfaction can be extracted from such expedient decision-making.

Once someone puts in place seeking short-term relief from problems as their go-to solution, and they do this for a period of time, they will begin to define themselves by their fight against the injustice of their painful lives. This self-limiting erroneous perspective then develops into a cycle that keeps them on the bottom rungs of the satisfaction scale. As they observe their lives, they see that their personal happiness has very little fulfillment value. No longer do they bother to seek new long-term, solution-based options to move past their frustration; instead, they give up looking for problem-solving options and cycle endlessly through unpleasant emotional events, relationships and circumstances. They then accept this as the best they can do. Once this short-term pattern is established the next emotion to gain a foothold is self-pity. Once self-pity is firmly fixed in their relief seeking process they have actually completed the five-step cycle that ensures continued pain and a very low-level of overall happiness. Take a moment to consider these five steps:

**1. Individuals begin this vicious cycle by first, being in emotional, mental and/or physical pain. They can be in this state of unrest for any number of factors in the human condition that are painful or uncomfortable, then...**

**2. They seek short-term relief from their emotional, mental or physical strife. This might be through temporarily changing behavior, only to go back to it moments, days or weeks later. Or as described earlier in the cultural connection chapter they might drink or drug in response to these issues which causes more problems. The point is that the relief gained ends up being temporary and the original problem remains unsolved. Then...**

**2. They decide to fall back down in exhaustion and self-created defeat because the issues that are reasons for their pain remain unsolved and very real. The only solution these individuals see at this point is to retreat back...**

**3. ... into renewed and now validated, self-pity (rather than solving the problem for good).**

**4. Once back in self-pity, the cycle has now run full circle back to the emotional, mental or physical pain, because self-pity is by its very nature painful. At the same time, the original reason for their painful situation has not been adequately addressed and thus requires perceived unending relief. And so the cycle begins again, but now with a greater neuroplastic reinforced brain circuit dedicated to it, making it that much easier to repetitively reinforce their own negative thought process. This sequence can be repeated endlessly as long as these individuals decide to continue in their downward spiral. But this does not have to be! We will show you exactly how you can end this self-defeating cycle and erase those brain circuits that support any current short-sighted perspective and choices. You have the power to change all of this; you always have.**

Individuals whose decision it is to continue to cycle through their personal problems in this unproductive manner may gain a sliver of happiness through the relief-seeking phase described in step two. However, keep in mind that the other four steps in the cycle reinforce negative aspects of the cycle rather than permanently solving the issue at hand. The miniscule scrap of happiness that can be extracted in step two is totally overwhelmed when compared to the other four steps which destroy what little comfort was gained during the moments of relief experienced in step two. This is why this cycle is so unsatisfying and results in creating minimum happiness at a low value.

This entire cycle is a maladaptive process and provides no solutions to the original problems. It requires little thought and courage, and puts the responsibility of one's actions on others where it does not belong and where it cannot be solved. In short, it is an underdeveloped manner of living that is quite common from childhood ages through early adolescence. Those who carry this maladaptive behavior pattern into adulthood cause themselves tremendous dissatisfaction in life. The contrast between those living in this reactive cycle and those who problem-solve is stark. This contrast is made all the more apparent with increased age. Most people outgrow this childhood pattern and then move up the life satisfaction scale by expanding their personal world views, options list, and problem solving skills, while the person in the

relief seeking cycle simply flounders in pain, frustration, and repeated failure.

At our retreats, we have spoken with thousands of people through the years that have this self-limited "relief seeking" approach to attaining happiness. Relief is the counterforce to pain, whether it is physical, emotional, or mental. If you struggle in this way, why would you accept that you must be in pain to begin with when in reality the vast majority of pain is self-created and thus completely avoidable? Is seeking relief on a consistent basis really an acceptable long-term plan for lifestyle fulfillment, especially as one grows in experience and age? As a human who is gifted with free will you are certainly not required to be in a state of mental, physical and/or emotional pain, nor do you have to relegate your pursuit of happiness to such narrow definitions. Most pain is completely avoidable by making some fundamental changes to your daily routines, both in thought and in action. (In later chapters we will address those rarer situations of unavoidable suffering and how to productively address these difficult circumstances.)

Only your unwillingness to explore possibilities for greater levels of satisfaction can keep you in this self-limiting cycle of pain and relief seeking. Do you want more for yourself? Do you think it is possible to attain a level of happiness that may be greater than what you have experienced in the past or are experiencing currently? Do you have the willingness to open

your mind to new possibilities, new options and a greater level of benefit from your actions? Do you want to be fulfilled?

The implication of seeking relief is that you are in enough pain to seek it. Being in a state of emotional pain certainly is unpleasant and unsatisfying, but the experience of being in pain can be a powerful motivator for positive change. Think about it! One simple dedicated decision to not give in to self-pity can change the course of your entire life; one simple decision. Your current pain (unhappiness) can become a motivation to seek new options to eliminate it from your life, permanently. Making a simple decision like this would be the defining mark that separates those individuals who remain on the lower rungs of the happiness value scale and those who make choices to climb to greater satisfaction levels.

This kind of progress depends on your willingness to change, develop, mature, and problem solve through thought, emotion and action. This process is made easier if you begin to think about new avenues of productive

“ The value of happiness gained from your choices is not the same for every choice you make. ”

living; new options! The first option for you to focus on to begin this wonderful transformation is to decide whether you are worth more than being a perpetual relief-seeker. So we will ask you that now; are you worth more than that? We think so. That is why we created this program for you. We know what it is like to walk out from behind our own self-created shadow and move on to develop into a new person. You can have this experience too!

## Options and Goals

People are naturally confronted with challenges throughout their lives. As each challenge is faced, a number of options are available. However, if you are cynical or rigid in your perceptions and thinking, then your options for problem-solving these challenges will be limited and cynical, cutting short both future opportunities for personal growth and a more satisfying existence.

Increasing your perception of available options has the potential to become one more tool in your arsenal to transform your life. With greater diversity to problem-solve difficult situations, individuals gain a sense of power over those situations. They are no longer reacting, but rather, they are planning. It is the difference between being a reactive person and being a proactive person. This difference will be discussed in detail in the third phase of this program, but for now it is important to know that proactive individuals see light at the end of the tunnel rather than remaining stalled and lost in the darkness of chosen fear. The more attainable they perceive their options are, the more value those potential solutions have for them.

The positive results from the new options and choices you make are based completely on what level of happiness you believe is attainable for you. Once again, Axiom Number Two comes into effect here; you are what you think. If your thinking is limiting (e.g. "I will never be an executive in a large company; I never finished the tenth grade."), you are guaranteed to never outgrow that thought and you will remain stuck at a low level of employment.

Of course, we don't use the term "stuck" literally. It's a choice, and many people don't even realize they're actually choosing to be stuck. One of the program authors recalls how he was first struck by the existence of such self-determined limits:

Many years ago, I asked a man in an AA meeting a hypothetical question. What if your "disease" could be "cured," would you be willing to do the things necessary to make that happen? At the time, the man's answer surprised me. He looked away for a moment then turned to me and said,

"I'm not sure. That idea scares me." This was an honest answer from an individual who had decided to limit his options and remain in a state of keeping "his disease" secure and in place. He had bought into the idea that his choices to drink and drug were manifestations of "his disease." His belief in "seeking relief from his [imagined] disease" by attending AA meetings was his chosen way to wrest a wisp of happiness from this world. For him it had become his only way.

Pain is easy to find in life. Simply do nothing and it will always find you. In this particular case he had a perfected cycle of...

- pain, (to be seen as diseased) to...
- relief, (go to AA meetings to relieve his affliction)...
- and back to pain again (his daily reminder of his disease at AA meetings).

This is how he actually defined himself. It was very important to him to stay in that particular cycle where he perceived a low risk of failure. By restricting his options down to one and lingering there, he was able to avoid the frightening prospect of self-change. To remain "sick" and in need of AA meetings guaranteed that he will not need to challenge any of his beliefs or his limited view for personal happiness. It also allowed him to avoid real life to a certain extent by remaining trapped in the AA recovery society subculture. In this sense, he was exercising his natural autonomy as a human being and stated it with honest clarity. Sadly though, he limited himself. His decision to remain sick would keep him from experiencing a higher level of happiness if he did not open his mind to other more exciting possibilities.

All humans have limitless mental options at their disposal. Each person can always choose to think differently about any given subject or situation. Yet, like the man described above, not everyone is willing to exercise their immense power of free will. How many people limit their options in life to avoid the risks of possible failure? In this man's case, his self-limiting process will keep him cycling in the lower level of happiness for as long as he keeps that perspective. This manner of decision making does, in fact, lower the risk of failure, but with lower risk usually comes lower rewards, hence the lower rank on the happiness value scale, and thus a less fulfilling overall existence.

While the Freedom Model does not judge this man's decision as bad or good, it simply states the reality that his decision to limit his options also limits his level of happiness as defined by his choice to consistently seek relief from pain. If you are unwilling to create exit strategies for this lower level of satisfaction you will always remain

within sight of pain. Again, your life will be defined by your consistent fight for a less painful existence.

The cycle is logical, but extremely self-limiting as pain (whether it is emotional, mental or physical) is a tough master to serve. It will eventually demand all of you, body and soul. However, as individuals open their minds to different perspectives and different wants, they naturally increase their mental options that are both positive and outside their current perspective of seeing pain as acceptable. New doors open immediately. Pain becomes a memory as you put into action those options and goals that provide a pathway beyond pain. That is how the universe is built; to expand opportunities, not constrict them. With a change in willingness, you can immediately begin to climb upwards on the life satisfaction scale and move away from misery.

## The Boredom/Thrill Cycle

While there are many people that choose to keep their lives in the pain/relief limited option cycle, this certainly isn't the case for everyone. Many people with unsatisfying patterns of substance use are in a similar cycle that revolves around boredom. The principles of how this cycle works are exactly the same. The user is bored with life and wants some fun or excitement. They know an easy way to get that brief excitement; substance use (or sex, gambling, shopping, etc). They get exactly what they choose, a quick thrill that ends up being fun or exciting or pleasurable for a moment, but the effects wear off fast, returning them to a humdrum existence.

The thing about quick thrills is that they become less and less thrilling as they're repeated; that is, you get exactly what you pay for. If you can imagine how boring and unfulfilling a roller coaster would become after you've ridden it 50 times in a row, then you can understand how sex, drugs, and gambling could do the same. It's not that any of these things are bad; it's that each of these can be used in unfulfilling ways.

How do you respond to a lack of fulfillment? Do you double down on the thrills? Do you find new thrills? Or do you look for options that bring greater, longer lasting happiness? Do you believe that expedient thrills are the best you can hope for in the way of happiness? If you keep aiming low, you will keep yourself low on the happiness scale. Thrills are, by definition, short lived, and if you see them as your main source of happiness, you will chase them forever.

Where this really becomes a vicious cycle is when the costs become great. All the time spent chasing thrills provides zero personal growth and zero dreams achieved; which

means you've spent a lot of time on activities with very low return. And, don't be too quick to dismiss the value of your time. Time is the only nonrenewable resource in your life. Once you've spent it, it is gone forever. Beyond that, the money and other material resources spent not only on the thrill, but in cleaning up any messes created leave you with even less resources to dedicate to more fulfilling activities. Often then, the response is to dive deeper into the pursuit of thrills. But it doesn't have to be that way; you can break the cycle whenever you're willing to believe you can choose to aim higher and achieve greater happiness.

## Options to Goals – from Dreams to Reality

We are all autonomous creatures, with the ability to live out our self-created scripts. As an example, many people are quite satisfied by drinking and drugging heavily. While most might disagree with this choice, if the individual is genuinely satisfied with it, then that means that the choice provides a high level of happiness. So, not every choice that people may judge as a bad choice is necessarily low on the satisfaction scale. It all comes down to personal likes and dislikes. All the choices that you make provide some level of happiness, just in different quantities and qualities. You evaluate your level of happiness by asking yourself how truly satisfied you feel with the choices you make. Without feeling judged, it becomes much easier to ask yourself, "is this working for me? Am I truly satisfied? Do I want more satisfaction and fulfillment from my choices? Do I want the value of my feeling of happiness to be greater?"

In order for your overall life fulfillment level to rise and for you to remain on that new plane for any extended period of time, two defining characteristics of your expanded options must be present:

First, you must believe that the options you pick to increase your fulfillment are doable. Some individuals jump up many levels at once because they believe with all their heart that the new life options are doable. This can lead to great positive changes in one's life. Again, with greater risk, come greater rewards.

Second, the option(s) you choose must be converted into written goals and then pursued. Converting your new options into goals will be discussed in detail throughout Life Movements Workbook #3 later on in the program. For now we are just exploring the process of opening your mind to new options and future possibilities as a first step towards ultimately fulfilling them through the goals process described later on.

Some options, after being formed into written goals will not be completed fully for any number of personal reasons, or reasons that are beyond the control of the individual. In these cases just the fact that the risk was taken and that action was initiated on the option chosen, may be enough to gain some observable satisfaction value to your overall happiness level. The point is that mental, emotional and sometimes even physical action needs to take place to attempt fulfilling the goal for real personal progress to be attained. The newly chosen option cannot just sit in the psyche getting dusty with an expectation that joyousness will spontaneously occur.

The following is an example of what to expect from characteristics of expanding your options:

A man in his thirties decides to take a risk and fulfill a dream he has had since his early teens. He decides to open his mind to an option that he has put off and avoided for many years, to go to Special Forces training to become a Navy SEAL. He converts the mental option into a written goal and gets started. This goal is a very difficult one, indeed, and is filled with many pitfalls with the odds solidly stacked against him. Just applying and attempting to be accepted by the military at that advanced age for that particular training school would be next to impossible. But should his option be driven with unwavering courage and hard work, the result will already begin to pay off. Simply attempting to compete with those ten years younger than him in such an intense and competitive environment would dramatically affect his satisfaction level and thus gain more value on his feelings of overall happiness. Should he put everything he has into this goal, and then be forced to accept that the younger men around him are simply too strong to compete with, the knowledge and experience of making the attempt will provide natural dividends. He will have climbed a rung or two regardless of the outcome because he had the courage and tried.

This brings us to Axiom Number Three.

***Axiom Number 3: Happiness is the only cognitive motivator in the human condition.***

When an individual is in the process of thinking, they are actively creating a mental cost and benefit analysis of a decision, behavior, or thought. It is weighed against the consequences and what will be gained from that choice. This happens, most of the time, without even being aware of it, as the pursuit of happiness is hard-wired into every

human being. That specific portion of decision making, the motive to gain happiness, is automatic. Whether it is deciding to take a sip of coffee or making a decision on what the next career move might be, this process is a constant analysis of what will provide the greatest level of happiness at any given moment in time; i.e. what will satisfy the most. Being that this mental cost vs. benefit process is a factually accurate depiction of what goes on in the mind, the opposite must also be true; no one can decide to do something that they feel will not make them happier. Now this statement is usually met with some skepticism. People say things like, “I know so-and-so who hurts himself everyday by shooting heroin...” or some variation of this to make the point that people do, indeed, decide to hurt themselves.

It is important to note that we did not say that people couldn't decide to hurt themselves. Many do. What was stated above was that no individual can consciously decide to do something that they feel will not bring them happiness on some level. There is a big difference between the two

statements. Individuals sometimes make decisions that might result in pain. However, just because the decision resulted in a painful experience does not mean that the individual's original intent

was to cause that pain. That would be like saying a professional motocross racer intended on becoming paralyzed in that last race when he hit the jump wrong. Obviously, that was not the intent, his intent was to feel the happiness of winning the race, but the result of that choice ended differently than he intended.

Then there are situations that look painful from an outside perspective, yet to the individual, the pain is the price for an intended benefit. For example, while you might not agree that someone with bulimia vomits to be happy, the reality is that they do. Vomiting is not pleasant and is certainly not the image of happiness we all like to project, yet bulimic individuals perform this act repeatedly to remain thin and to have control over their life; both of which provides the intended happiness they seek when vomiting. The price may be exceedingly high for this choice, (the bulimic may have serious negative long term health effects or even die) yet at the moment the choice to vomit was made, those costs were accepted or simply ignored. Another example would be self-mutilators; you might think they can't possibly cut and/or burn themselves to be happy, but in all actuality, they do. If cutters know that they are not being judged for their habit, they readily admit that it makes them “feel less numb,” a relative sense of low satisfaction happiness

“*By clearing away guilt and confusion, you can then use your mental resources to accurately assess your choices, behaviors, and habits to determine whether they still hold value for you.*”

(less miserable). You might drink and drug to the point of seizing or passing out with the sole drive to be happy for a little while. Why would it be difficult to believe that someone might take that process a few steps further as in the case of the bulimic or self-mutilator? The list of these types of uncomfortable behaviors and choices is extensive. People have hurt themselves and found scraps of happiness mixed in among these behaviors since the beginning of mankind. While you might not agree with the method of relief-seeking happiness as described above, it does not change the fact that these are paths to personal happiness for those individuals at that moment in time.

We do realize that this topic was covered in the Freedom Model topic earlier, so why is this important enough to be talked about again here? The answer is simple: to avoid the uncomfortable side of truth stated in Axiom Three is to also hide the paths to greater happiness that could await you. If you spend your days and nights feeling guilty or bewildered about those choices that currently bring you happiness with high costs, (no matter how low on the satisfaction scale they may be) then you cannot use your mental abilities to accurately assess whether those choices are still worth the pain that they cause, or whether you may have better options that provide greater happiness with less of a downside. You cannot compare a current low value behavior with one that might bring greater satisfaction if you do not know your current status first. We have used extreme examples here simply to demonstrate that happiness can be defined in very dark parameters. Any choice that provides happiness and pain must, by definition, be quite low on the satisfaction scale and thus provide little in the way of overall fulfillment.

So how does one grow past accepting pain as a partner to their happiness, satisfaction and fulfillment? First, by letting go of guilt and calling your habits what they are: attempts at building and creating moments of happiness, however brief and unsatisfying they may be. By clearing away guilt and confusion, you can then use your mental resources to accurately assess your choices, behaviors, and habits to determine whether they still hold value for you. Next, ask yourself whether other options may provide less downside. Then build a plan to achieve those newer options by converting them to written goals.

***Axiom Number Four: There is no shortcut to sustainable, stable, long-term happiness.***

This is a simple, yet powerful concept; the concept of lifestyle stability. To understand the benefits of Axiom Number Four, let's take a brief look at its opposite; short-term decision-making induced chaos.

The word chaos describes adolescence, does it not?

Drama infused relationships, rumor milling, extreme highs followed by even more extreme lows, vacillations from being popular to unpopular, loneliness, stressful fears and self-absorption, etc. It is the era of short-term planning and suffering the consequences (both good and bad) of those kinds of expedient decisions. It is exhilarating, frustrating, fun and maddening all in the same breath. It is that time in life when society puts up with your mistakes, poor decisions, and expedient choices that sometimes end in disaster. Many people allow for adolescents emotional outbursts, temper tantrums (sometimes) and overzealous excitability. It is described as a time of heaven, hell and every possibility in between. But isn't that how adolescence is supposed to be? Adolescence is that era in life where hopefully, you emerge from it the wiser for it all.

As people learn from their experiences, most begin to slow down and think before they act. It is the time in life when people are supposed to learn to think in different parameters, adult parameters. These new adult parameters should produce an understanding that distinguishes between expedient short-term choices and those choices that create more beneficial outcomes based on deferred gratification. Most do not know that adolescence is a cultural construction of industrialized societies. Many cultures have childhood and adulthood with no ambiguous transition. (Epstein, 2007) Think about that; in many societies, the struggles of adolescence are not tolerated between ages 12 – 20 as they are here in the United States; and they are definitely not tolerated by those who choose to carry these behaviors into adulthood as so many do here.

As people mature and collect enough life experience to know which decisions result in pain and which do not, they begin the process of establishing a sustainable pattern of long-term satisfaction that minimizes the downside. Up to now, you have been focusing on examining each choice you make. This axiom, however, discusses patterns of behaviors resulting from many choices and if sustainable satisfaction is achieved from them. There are really three ways in which Axiom Number Four is fulfilled:

- Some individuals make a long string of repetitive short-term benefit choices as their primary mode of decision-making. When they do this short-term gratifying choices must be made over and over again to produce sustainable, stable, long-term behaviors. The reason is time. Each short-term gratification allows for a brief amount of time in the pleasure stage (e.g. using cocaine). Consequently, this class of satisfaction tends to be low because of the amount of time spent in the benefit stage is so brief. Choices that bring about such brief satisfaction also tend to have a high price associated with them; not

just financial but also emotional, mental and physical as well. Simply put, for most people the costs outweigh the benefits in the long run. This pattern naturally encourages searching for more satisfying options; hence the reason most teenagers naturally adapt into adulthood.

■ Maturing into adulthood is defined by individuals making plans for long term satisfaction to the exclusion of short-term choices for immediate gratification. Of course, by deferring gratification this guarantees a certain level of long-term success. However, not every benefit gained by Axiom Number Four, in this particular manner, is necessarily the most satisfying. For instance, sometimes individuals become so rigid in their adherence to this axiom of deferring gratification that they miss the beauty of some short-term, immediate gratification opportunities. This brings us to the next category.

■ As previously mentioned, mature individuals defer their gratification as the foundation for much of their decision-making. They plan well, they can see beyond today and they build a stable life. This is what is meant by Axiom Number Four, that there is no shortcut to lasting happiness. But this does not preclude knowing how to enjoy the present. Mature people sprinkle their lives with short-term gratification on top of the foundation they build by applying Axiom Number Four. While these folks know what it means to be responsible by deferring their gratification in many areas of life, they also know that there is a time and place for short-term fun. This mode of thinking is the best possible use of Axiom Number Four, to implement long term planning in many areas of life that will naturally provide you a stable foundation in areas like career, hobbies, relationships, etc. But it is just as important to highlight this stability by also enjoying the moment once in a while. Rigid thinking (in either direction – short or long term) can be the enemy of satisfactory happiness. Don't let that happen to you. The problem with most unsatisfied people is that they are unwilling to find the balance between deferring gratification and allowing themselves the freedom to enjoy the moment, too.

A quick example of this self-limiting behavior pattern is the dad who is so busy planning and building a career for his financial security in retirement that he loses memorable moments that he could have made with his kids during those busy years. That is certainly not

a positive experience. Putting Axiom Number Four into action without enhancing it with other fun activities is to miss out on creating stability while enjoying that stable lifestyle. We wish the best for you, and building that balance between the present and the future can be the best of both worlds!

With all this said, if you cannot accept Axioms Three and Four for the truths that they are, you will always believe that the world is out to get you, and that your pain is unjustified (i.e. "Stuff just happens to me!"). This means you will remain unwilling to challenge your beliefs. We hope you avoid this guilty self-pity and decide whether you want to believe you are worth more than tying your happiness to choices that are part of the pain cycle.

The question is simply this; do you believe YOU ARE WORTH MORE THAN THAT? Are you worth more than 12 beers a day, or 3 bags of heroin, or painful relationships, or an unfulfilling career, or feeling like you are on an endless treadmill going nowhere, or being too afraid to try new things? You receive exactly what you have decided is the level of satisfaction and fulfillment you feel you are worth receiving today. If you are ready to let go of the past standards you have held for yourself and develop options that will provide higher levels of satisfaction coupled with lower levels of pain, then you are ready to tackle the remaining content of this program. Are you ready to balance long-term happiness and short-term happiness?

Remember, Axioms Three and Four do not automatically require pain to be present in the lifestyle equation nor do they require you to be a stick-in-the-mud. The only unavoidable result of these axioms is that some level of happiness will be present in your choices and intentions, and now you get to choose what level of satisfaction your choices will bring, and what short-term and long-term paths you can take to get there. Are you ready to open your mind to new possibilities? We hope so, and we look forward to you learning how to make them a reality in your new life! Remember, it is an unavoidable truth that happiness is the only cognitive motivator in the human condition and there is no shortcut to sustainable, stable, long-term happiness. The real question is: how are you going to apply these truths in your life?

## CHAPTER 14

# The Fifth Axiom: Your Happiness is in Your Own Hands

*“Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions.”*

– Dalai Lama

There are physical laws that maintain order in the physical world, (like gravity and the atomic structure) and then, as we have explained in the last 4 axioms, there are truths that sustain us and empower us emotionally, mentally and spiritually. If people accept these axioms and learn to live in concert with these truths and work their choices to maximize their satisfaction levels, they are guaranteed to grow in joy and prosperity. However, these truths or axioms also allow for an equal right to limit one’s level of happiness. If, for instance, you do not understand how the universe and its axioms work or if you do have knowledge of them and you choose not to use them to your greatest potential and advantage, you limit the beneficial effect the axioms can provide. Freewill allows for low-level happiness values to be chosen just as easily as high level joy. How you implement the Axioms is up to you.

Remember, the Axioms are unavoidable and are built into the fabric of the human condition to provide a natural guidance system that allows for continuous personal growth. By simply understanding their inherent power, you will become open to choosing higher happiness values if that is what you desire. With that said, you can only gain the greatest chances for positive change in your life by knowing that *each axiom exists to benefit you*. There are no downsides to any of the Five Axioms; they simply provide an avenue for you to be able to express your freewill in any manner in which you feel is best.

Having gone through the struggle to change our own destructive habits, the authors of this text were relieved to finally realize that we had full control over our choices, at both the level of thought and the level of action. But what solidified our choice to move on from low-satisfaction behaviors was the deep belief that we could create a more joyful existence for ourselves if we tried. Tired of waiting for a better life to run up and bite us, we made a decision to fully embrace the responsibility we had to create what we wanted. We realized that our happiness was in our own hands.

The evidence that pointed us to the present axiom, “your happiness is in your own hands”, is stunning and undeniable. Throughout the world, in every time and place, there exist people, who against all odds, managed to create their own happiness; (and the truth is that all people, whether facing hardship or incredible luck, are responsible for creating their own levels of happiness every day). Let’s look at some extreme examples to understand what happiness really is.

A great example of the Fifth Axiom in action can be seen in countries such as Ethiopia and Cambodia that have been ravaged by war and famine. In many areas of these countries, men, women, and children were starving and in some situations the relief workers who went to help them had only enough food for half of the local population. In these horrible conditions the relief workers were amazed and inspired by what they observed. The majority of the children who were given food *immediately* shared what

meager amounts they had with the children who were not given food when supplies ran out. Workers also observed that this sharing created an atmosphere of happiness and, in many cases, even giddiness and laughter. What is even more telling is the fact that the children who were sharing their food displayed the same joy as those who were receiving it. Where they had nothing, and were literally dying, and where there would be no material exchange for the food they so desperately needed, these children were still able to make the choice to enjoy the act of giving and showing love to their fellow children. They took their happiness into their own hands.

Prisons are another extreme situation in which the exercise of free choice to be happy can be seen. This example comes from Russian born political prisoner, Natan Sharansky, who spent nine years in a Soviet prison. When asked in an interview if he had difficulty adjusting to freedom when he was finally released, his paraphrased response was:

“Oh, no, no, no, no, no, because I was always free while I was in prison... freedom is a state of mind. Freedom is who I am. Freedom is how I was born. Freedom is how I was created. Freedom. I’m a free man.” (Limbaugh, 2005)

But he wasn’t *physically* free. On the contrary, he was in prison, being held against his will. Surely, anyone should fall apart under such oppressive conditions, but his explanation of how he considered himself free shows the resilience of the human spirit. He went on to give an example of how freedom was a state of mind. He explained that he took joy in telling jokes at the expense of all the big Soviet leaders. He and the other prisoners would laugh and enjoy themselves, but the guards who were surely listening in would stay stone-faced. They wouldn’t dare to laugh, because they had chosen to be part of the system, and to keep their mind closed to anything that undermined their rulers. From the prisoner’s point of view, he was freer than the guards, even while in prison! The jokes he told symbolized his inner freedom, which he held up as a banner of pride. He was able to take happiness into his own hands through his chosen attitude, literally creating it where no material comforts were available to him. (Limbaugh, 2005)

Perhaps he had read the seminal work of Dr. Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search For Meaning*. In the book Dr. Frankl tells the story of his times in the horrific concentration camps of Nazi Germany. Frankl, the dedicated psychologist that he was, carefully observed the thoughts and behaviors of his fellow prisoners and found a common theme. Those who focused on some sort of purpose to survive were more likely to survive; and conversely, those who lost their sense of meaning or purpose would quickly

succumb to the torture. Often, the objects of the survivors’ attention were the loved ones that they were determined to reunite with after their release. Frankl saw this focus on personally meaningful things as a choice. In his own case, an object of his hopeful focus was work that he had yet to complete:

*As for myself, when I was taken to the concentration camp of Auschwitz, a manuscript of mine ready for publication was confiscated. Certainly, my deep desire to write this manuscript anew helped me to survive the rigors of the camps I was in. For instance, when in a camp in Bavaria I fell ill with typhus fever, I jotted down on little scraps of paper many notes intended to enable me to rewrite the manuscript, should I live to the day of liberation. I am sure that this reconstruction of my lost manuscript in the dark barracks of a Bavarian concentration camp assisted me in overcoming the danger of cardiovascular collapse. (p. 104)*

By grasping onto something that was important to him, he reinforced his spirit and will to live. Having seen the principle acted out in such extreme conditions, Frankl makes no bones about the fact that people are freely choosing to be responsible for their own happiness in such situations:

*The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress.*

*We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.*

*...in the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone. Fundamentally, therefore, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him—mentally and spiritually. He may retain his human dignity even in a concentration camp. (p. 65-66)*

There is a common thread to these stories, and it is that no matter how dire the situation, the participants retained and made use of their inner freedom to take responsibility for their own happiness. They chose to engage in ways of thought and action that could provide them with happiness from within. The starving children simply enjoyed the act of sharing; the political prisoner took pride in the freedom of his mind; and the concentration camp inmates applied a variety of strategies choosing positive attitudes, helping their fellow inmates and focusing on personally meaningful pursuits; all ways to create happiness.

We present this information not as a means to shame you into being grateful for what you have because “it could be worse,” but rather to show you that the principle of personal control over happiness always exists. You, too, hold your happiness in your own hands, as does every human being. No one can take it away from you, and no one can truly give it to you without your consent. Because of the fact that you are what you think, you are the creator of your own happiness levels. Faced with a world of human souls striving to pursue happiness, you decide whether to be an active, creative, contributing force or not. You are the one who decides what is meaningful to your life, and you decide whether to enjoy exerting your power to create maximum happiness or not.

## Love, the Verb

Anyone can suffer from a dampened spirit. When your expectations on others are set high, and you focus on all the ways those expectations aren't met, it's easy to become discouraged. All people want to feel like they belong; all want to feel loved, yet these common human desires can be approached in very different ways, with radically different results. Many of our guests have experienced feeling bitter, lonely, and disconnected from others, in other words, unloved. This is not uncommon in the human experience, but when this feeling becomes your norm, it may be time to shake things up and reconsider your approach.

It helps to recognize that love is a verb; it is an action word. Love is actively created by individuals through acts of kindness, generosity, and respect for their fellow man. By recognizing the principle that your happiness is in your own hands, you can embrace the responsibility

you have to take an active role in creating the positive feelings you desire.

When someone shows us love, we can either accept it or reject it. That is, it takes action on our part to recognize it for what it is, and to open our heart to it, if we want to feel it. Love is hard to pin down to a definition, but the rules of how it works and how it's experienced seem apparent. It takes willing participants who aren't afraid to recognize positivity, and who are also ready to say yes to any experience that has the potential to be uplifting, joyful, or productive.

But that's just the reactive side of experiencing love and joy. When fully embraced, the axiom points toward proactive creation of the happiness you desire. Since the experience of love requires active participants, those who feel as if they're low on love-based happiness face two

basic alternatives: wait and hope for it to come their way; or engage in acts that actively create and channel it. To simply wait for it is to ignore the axiom that *your happiness is in your own hands*. When the love doesn't come your

way as often or in the manner you're expecting, then you're left feeling empty and barely satisfied with life. But to truly take responsibility for the love you wish to feel is to create it through acts of love that you initiate.

As the starving children in our examples did, you have the power to give of yourself and create positivity at any given moment. You can share your resources of time and energy whenever you like. You can give of yourself, be kind, or help a person in need. Instantly you will feel love for its own sake. Over the years, our guests have found that giving within their sphere of influence is the most immediate surefire way to take their happiness into their own hands.

## Fueling Self-Change

Over the last two decades we have researched, witnessed and experienced many different and valuable techniques that bring about rapid positive change. You will learn about every one of those techniques throughout this text and its accompanying workbooks. With that said, we want to introduce a theme, and hopefully this theme will develop into a learned and practiced habit that will naturally fuel positive change while you are going through the rest of the program. This habit, while simple, well known, and powerful, can be difficult to put into practice because it

“ Our guests have found that giving within their sphere of influence is the most immediate surefire way to take their happiness into their own hands. ”

takes effort. The habit we are talking about is to become a more giving and less self-absorbed individual.

Now mind you, no one here is judging you, nor is this an attempt to analyze you from some lofty hilltop as a “bad” or “selfish” person, as that helps no one. We’ve known you for just a short time, so we want you to know that the statement above is not a blanket statement that our guests are “selfish,” “bad,” or have selfish motivations. Most of our guests are already riddled with guilt and remorse; there would be no need for us to stack on more!

Rather, we are presenting the simple idea of becoming *more* in tune with other’s needs as this can fuel and energize much greater positive self-change. It is really quite simple. All people start this process at a certain level of happiness (or lack thereof), and the idea that you become more in tune with the needs of others will naturally build higher levels of stability and problem solving ability. Everyone benefits.

We have seen many people drowning in their own self-created troubles. By concentrating on other’s needs, even briefly, a whole world of new problem solving options begin to unfold. Please understand you will spend a tremendous amount of time working out your own troubles while you are completing this program. Balancing your focus on self with a concerted daily effort to get out of your self-based comfort zone once in a while may be a wise habit to practice. Many of life’s struggles were solved through mankind’s efforts to *bring comfort to someone else*. It just works that way. As the ancients have said in many different languages throughout the world, *to give is to receive*. No truer words have been spoken, and we encourage you to try it as you work through the program. It is just one more method to fulfill Axiom Five.

## Giving vs. Sacrificing – Two Different Definitions of Charity

With this talk of giving, we need to be careful to state that we’re not recommending that anyone engage in self-sacrifice as a means to happiness. Many people are quick to equate giving with sacrifice, but there are major differences between the two. Sacrifice in its common definition is seen as experiencing a personal loss of some kind. If I sacrifice something, I lose that something and *I know it*. Some might actively sacrifice in their lives to gain attention as a martyr or to feel that they might absolve their guilt through self-sacrifice or some type of emotional flogging. Or they might sacrifice in some form

as a function of their religious upbringing and beliefs and find it makes them feel good to do so. Each of these types of sacrifice is chosen behaviors to attain a certain level of happiness, no different than any other choice or activity. These types of sacrificial activities tend to produce lower satisfaction levels because they are associated with some level of loss. With that said, like many choices people make, sacrificing one’s money, time, and resources is inherently designed to bring about some form of satisfaction and fulfillment or *people would not do it*.

Giving, however, is a desire to provide something to others because that action, in and of itself, fulfills the Freedom Model Law of Universal Motivation; you are always moving in the direction of what you believe will provide the most happiness at that moment in time. In this particular instance, *giving* something to someone might

be motivated by the desire to then receive the benefits of that giving. In other words, in most instances, we give to get, i.e. to feel better or to simply feel good. In that aspect alone it is no different than the individual who sacrifices

something for the benefit of others as a path to their own personal happiness. However, when giving or providing others with something they need or want, the defining difference between that act, and the act of sacrificing is quite clear. To give is to provide, to sacrifice is to provide but **also take pleasure in the feeling of loss**. This is a huge difference. There is no requirement for feeling loss when *giving* as there is when *sacrificing*. That is the defining difference between the two. You don’t have to lose to give; you can give as an expression of your values, creating happiness for yourself, and simultaneously bettering the situations you care about.

Please understand this is not just semantics. Sacrifice means *feeling loss as a path to feel better about you*. Sounds strange when it is put that way, but it’s true.

In contrast, giving means to provide a path to feeling good about oneself, *without the feeling (or reality) of loss*. That is the simple factual difference between the two manners of charity. We must be careful to avoid judgment here as neither path is inherently better than the other. Each autonomous individual can choose which method works best for them. Again, some learn to sacrifice based on their upbringing or religion, while others learn to give without the negative feelings that would inherently accompany a deliberate loss (sacrifice). But both provide certain benefits, or people would not give or sacrifice at all.

“ Our guests have found that giving within their sphere of influence is the most immediate surefire way to take their happiness into their own hands. ”

Deep happiness is nearly impossible to achieve by demanding it, taking it, manipulating others into giving it to you, or by holding tightly to all that you own. Those are hollow low satisfaction scenarios. You take positive control of your life when you stop measuring your happiness by what other people can give you, (or give back to you) and start building your level of happiness based on the positive values that you create. Further, if you contribute to your sphere of influence without expectations, the results will be dramatic increases in satisfaction. Keep in mind that sometimes people must live this positive side of the axiom for an extended period of time before they see results. The universe does not always respond immediately.

## Maximizing Benefits by Moderating Expectations

As we explained earlier, to give is to receive. But that statement assumes you are giving with little to no desire for something in return; no expectations. The experience of happiness based on productive acts of loving, giving, and kindness can be lessened by having rigid expectations. As a simple example, imagine you perform a basic act of kindness such as opening a door for someone. You could enjoy this act because you know what it feels like to have someone do the same for you; and thus you've completely taken responsibility for your own happiness with no expectations. When the person you held the door open for responds by smiling and thanking you, you've now received an extra, unexpected return of positivity on top of the happiness you already felt in performing the act itself. But if you go into the situation with the expectation of a smile and thanks, and *then you don't get it*, then you've effectively limited or even entirely destroyed the happiness you could've received from your choice. Heavy expectations limit the potential for a satisfying outcome.

To say that people should live a life devoid of any expectations would be foolish. It is the very expectation and promise of happiness that drives each and every one of us to get out of bed in the morning and push forward toward our dreams. So, we believe an expectation-free life is a rare bird, indeed. But what is possible is designing one's expectations and choices in ways that maximize potential happiness.

When you mentally decide that you won't be happy unless

your actions result in a, b and c, then you won't be happy until a, b, and c happens. Meanwhile, x, y, and z might occur, but your demands for a, b, and c have blocked the happiness you could've received from results x, y, and z. Again, this isn't to say you shouldn't have expectations, but where can you make your expectations more flexible? Where can you limit your expectations and be more open? There are plenty of opportunities to make this cognitive shift and increase your happiness potential.

Some relationships like marriage come with certain expectations (vows), and these contractual vows ensure that both parties know what they should provide for and expect from each other. This can help hold the relationship together during tough times. This does not mean, however, that each participant would not benefit from greater conscious generosity shown to the other. In day-to-day living, the Fifth Axiom can transform relationships, business dealings, and how you interact with the world. Within any relationship each party can certainly hope the other party acts in ways that are loving, kind and generous, and this, then, places happiness in the other party's hands. Unfortunately when you wait for others to provide you happiness, you are usually disappointed in

their performance. But, if even one person in the relationship takes their happiness into their own hands, and gives to the other without expectation, the relationship grows so much more than if both parties simply wait for,

or demand more, from the other. When a person acts kindly without an expectation of anything other than the happiness naturally provided by their actions, it is a *guaranteed* win.

A marriage is essentially a contract between two people; the business world has formalized relationships in the forms of contracts as well. These contracts itemize the expectations of each party. This is unavoidable as it provides a safeguard for each party to receive the expected benefits from the relationship, but each party can also benefit greatly if both practice giving freely and work diligently to ensure the other is successful. The business that goes the extra mile has a tendency to outperform its competitors. The marriage (or any interpersonal relationship) in which both parties refuse to "keep score" has a much greater chance of going the distance. The point is: even those relationships that are defined by vows, expectations or contracts, can benefit by one member of the relationship taking responsibility for increasing happiness and practicing "extra" giving without expectations.

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*Reality does not tolerate inaction for very long.*

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Reality does not tolerate inaction for very long. Productive action towards happiness is repaid in some way at some point. With too many expectations, you risk missing the unexpected ways your efforts may be rewarded. The challenge in our expectation-driven lives is how to give *freely* of ourselves and our resources; opening ourselves to accept unexpected benefits. To give is to receive, and many times we receive quite unexpectedly down the line.

A great place to begin is with the decision to care for others without an expectation for some direct immediate return, to spend time with those who are lonely and to be grateful for those close to you. Life is hard enough without adding to its difficulties, so begin to give more and expect less and you will be happier. This is one important way that you can embrace your power over your own happiness.

Business relationships, and to a certain degree, marriages, are at their base, voluntary *exchanges*. Again, both parties know what is expected of the other, thus they can live up to the terms of the contract (the expectations) and satisfy each other. But to exchange is different in nature than to give. When massive expectations are unknowingly heaped upon another person as part of a giving act, then nothing was truly given. Instead, you have effectively entered into a situation where the other party is now involved in an exchange that they didn't voluntarily engage in with terms they don't know. Thus, they are not likely to live up to your expected terms of the exchange, leaving you dissatisfied. While it may look as if they have hurt you, the disappointment is entirely of your own doing, as you created a situation that is certain to disappoint. The solution for greater personal happiness is to not put others in the position of being a party to an unknown exchange. This can be done by either truly giving, with no expectations, or by making your expectations clear to everyone involved. If you have expectations or conditions on your generosity make sure you have communicated these expectations or conditions to the receiver of your generous act. This way they can make an informed decision of whether or not they want to participate.

Some may mistake our discussion of expectations as a recommendation to "lower your standards," but we would never ask you to do such a thing. There are times when discussing your wants or expectations with others can increase personal happiness, as it directs you into situations that achieve your wants. Setting up such voluntary exchanges certainly is a way of embracing responsibility for your own happiness. The issues to be considered though are when and where you think it is appropriate to set up such exchanges, and when you think that freely giving to a situation would be a better

solution. Moving yourself into situations that meet your requirements will be discussed later. True giving, however, affirms one's ability to be a contributive positive force and is a way to be productive and express one's love of life. Being a positive, productive and loving force is one of the most independent ways you can ensure the creation of greater happiness in your own life.

Thus, it would seem as though happiness and success go hand in hand. That is happiness and success is one in the same, at least, that is what most people think. But maybe we should take a closer look, maybe they are not the same thing at all. Happiness is an experience lived. Success, on the other hand, is a measurement of the happiness one experiences along the way. To wit, a boy approaches his father and asks, "How do you know if you are successful?" His father replied, "I will know I have been successful in my life when I leave here knowing I gave more than I took." That father embraced the fact that his happiness was in his own hands. And, he knew that only he could measure his own happiness.

All human minds are independent of all other human minds; everyone's happiness and success are unique to each individual. This is evidenced by two important facts about your nature as a human being:

1. Your mind functions independently. That is, no one can think for you, no one can force a thought into your mind.
2. Emotions, including happiness, come from your thoughts.

## The Independent Mind

Throughout history, people have tried to force thoughts into the minds of others, and it hasn't worked. For example, tyrannical governments have done everything they can to barrage their citizens with propaganda that supports the oppressive government's positions. They've done everything possible to stop the free exchange of ideas, including censoring and banning all media, such as books, the internet, movies, etc., that could serve as a source of alternative ideas. This is done in an effort to control what people think; to coerce their minds. Yet in the face of all this force, there are always people who continue to think for themselves and independently generate their own thoughts and opinions that break with the norm. Throughout history this ability to think independently has always led to the eventual crumbling of such oppressive regimes.

After having spent untold dollars and resources trying to control the minds of others, tyrants eventually come face to face with this undeniable fact of reality, that you can wield great *influence* over people, but you can't *control* what they think. Each individual has the final say on what he/she thinks and believes. Although some may accept tyrannical propaganda, it is only by the *consent* of those governed that rulers succeed at influencing their thoughts. Our example of the political prisoner is a powerful case that makes this point; he chose not to accept what he was told and to grasp tightly onto the exercise of his own freedom of thought. No one can think for you. This is important to keep in mind while examining the next concept.

## The Cognitive Basis of Emotions

It has long been understood that emotions are created by thoughts. This is known as the cognitive theory of emotion. In the cognitive theory, people experience life events, judge those events as either good or bad, and experience an emotion as the result of that judgment. Consider the scenario of parents in the bleachers watching their children's sporting event. By the end of the game, all of the parents witnessed the same exact event, yet half of the parents are experiencing a positive emotion, while the other half is experiencing a negative emotion. What caused these vastly different emotional results? Take your pick from three possible causes:

1. Differing levels of neurotransmitters and brain activity.
2. The events directly caused the emotional response.
3. Half the parents judged the outcome of the game as generally "good," while the other half judged the outcome of the game as generally "bad."

If it were only neurotransmitter levels and brain activity that caused emotions, it would be quite a coincidence that the parents of the losing team had a random burst of depressive brain activity, and the parents of the winning team had a random burst of rewarding brain activity; both having this reaction at the exact moment that the game ended. That would be something, wouldn't it?

If specific events determined specific emotional responses in people, that would be quite interesting, too. How could you account for the fact that the parents all experienced the same events, yet half had one emotional reaction, and half had the opposite reaction?

Things start to make sense though, once we consider the actual thoughts and beliefs that make up the value systems of the parents. The parents of the winning team probably judged the outcome as "good" for a variety of reasons having mostly to do with their children. A win would mean their children had performed well, or at least better than the opposing team. Such displays of ability are gratifying for parents who are obviously invested in raising capable children. A win would also mean the children would leave the game happy and proud of what they'd done, therefore creating a happier night for the whole family. The situation could be interpreted plenty of ways, but these two basic judgments would exist in the minds of most parents. Likewise, for those parents whose children lost the game, various judgments of the outcome as "bad" may arise, based on the expected negative effects of the loss, again on the children and the parents. Likewise, negative emotions will follow the evaluation of the outcome of the game as "not-so-good."

This process of emotion formation may be conscious and directly traced to thoughts immediately preceding the emotion, but it is often subconscious and automatically processed according to previous value judgments. And certainly, in a real situation like the example described above, the results won't be so clear-cut. Every parent of a losing child won't necessarily be upset, nor will every parent of a winning child necessarily be happy. There will be great variation depending on the thoughts and belief systems of each individual parent. For those who've attended such events, the reason for the variance should be clear. Often, there is a parent who is obsessed with their child being the star, and getting maximum playing time on the team. The child may score a goal, and the team may win, yet this parent is still upset. Why are they upset? They paid conscious attention to another child getting more time on the field, and they thought about this in a way that created negative emotion. What this parent personally thought to be of utmost importance (their child being the star) wasn't upheld, and therefore the situation is perceived as "bad" and anger follows. Sitting next to someone going through this, you can see it build throughout the game as they consciously monitor how long each player is on the field. Another parent of a child on the same team may just think that it is important for their child to be doing something they enjoy, making friends, and getting some physical exercise. Whether the game is a win or a loss for the team never seems to matter too much to this parent; she's happy at every game.

What this discussion shows us is that a particular event doesn't have to trigger a particular emotion; the event is not the cause of an emotion. It's the individual's evaluation of the event as personally favorable or unfavorable that determines the emotional reaction.

The point of this discussion isn't to say that neurotransmitters aren't involved in emotions. They certainly seem to be involved in emotions, but they are not the cause. Also we don't mean to imply that events aren't involved at all; they clearly are to some extent. All of the research (and common sense) indicates that these factors are involved in emotions being felt and expressed, but that isn't the same as causing them. For something to be considered a cause, its outcome, literally, could have been no other way. But clearly, if one chooses to think differently, then different emotions will result. That is, the buck seems to stop with the personal thoughts and beliefs that precede emotional reactions. When emotional reactions are analyzed in real life, thoughts always win as the clear cause.

This cognitive view of emotions is one aspect of the axiom *you are what you think*, but has important implications for the current axiom. Taken together with the fact that each individual can only think for himself or herself, it becomes crystal clear that *your happiness is in your own hands*. That is, you can choose to think differently in order to feel differently. This doesn't mean that you should try to evade all negative feelings through self-delusion. There will be times when you will face circumstances that are horrible, and you needn't ever deny how bad things are at that moment. But what do you do from there? Do you approach such circumstances by making the easy turn to thoughts of hopelessness, or the courageous turn to focus on solutions based in constructive thought and action? It is your choice; *your happiness is in your own hands*.

It should be clear from our examples of people in dire situations, that you always have the ability to actively choose a happier path. You can always give, even when you have nothing other than love and attention to offer. You can always contribute to any situation. What's more, you can also apply yourself to any pursuit that you find personally meaningful, as Viktor Frankl did when he turned to his work for personal strength in his darkest moments, or as the political prisoner did when he turned to his value of freedom as expressed through his sense of humor.

## Expectations versus Standards

You don't have to be in a dire situation to recognize and use your power to create happiness. Whatever pursuit you find personally meaningful can bring great happiness when committed to and acted upon. People from all walks of life, dealt all sorts of hands, are able to break free from the inertia of a mildly satisfying life and reach for more. Bold choices and embracing personal responsibility are the key ingredients. For example,

there is the story of the video game designers working for Atari in the late 70's. These folks had watched the industry blow up, and their employers making hundreds of millions of dollars off their work, while they only made fixed salaries in the range of 20-30 thousand dollars a year. The programmers approached their bosses and asked for more money, but they were laughed at and told that they were instantly replaceable. They didn't wait for raises, they didn't go on strike and they didn't accept any less than they thought they deserved. They promptly left Atari and banded together to form their own company to create and market their own games, making millions for themselves. In fact, they created the entire industry of third party video game manufacturers. The company they created, Activision, is still one of the largest players in the gaming industry today, and the programmers all went on to make fortunes. They refused to let their happiness be dependent on their employer; they took their own happiness and future into their own hands.

This is an example where expectations were modified, but standards were not lowered. When the programmers saw that their expectations would not be met by their current employer, they stopped expecting this company to provide the standard of compensation they deemed themselves to be worth. They took it upon themselves to get into a position where they could earn what they were worth. Millions of people suffer in such business and personal relationships that simply don't live up to their standards. While lowering your standards can be of immediate comfort, the task of courageously seeking out or creating the situation that meets your standards is harder, but the rewards can be much greater. We all have the choice of whether to depend upon our own positive thoughts and actions for happiness or to attempt to shift the responsibility for our happiness onto others.

It's important to recognize the difference between standards and expectations. In this case, the standard is "if my work generates millions in profits, then I'll only continue to do it if I'm paid well." A standard is a personal belief that limits or expands and directs *your own* actions. It can guide you towards certain decisions, specifically, in this case, it can guide you to find an employer who agrees with your terms, or to become an entrepreneur and pay yourself. A standard doesn't attempt to shift the responsibility for personal reward into anyone else's hands. However, the *expectations* based on this standard are a different animal. For example "my current employer will recognize the value of my work and pay me what I think I deserve." He may or may not fulfill your standard; so what do you do if he doesn't? If you're focused on expectations, you live in disappointment and victimhood. If you're focused on standards, you make new choices that will bring you closer to fulfilling them.

Throughout this text, we have hinted at the issue of standards, repeatedly asking you to question whether you are worth more than the levels of happiness and fulfillment you have allowed for yourself. Now, we address it explicitly, and far from suggesting that you lower your standards, we want you to know that you can set them high if you so choose and still find happiness (assuming your standards are workable and that you're willing to do the work). *The key to meeting those standards in the*

*most direct way possible is to reject the notion that others must fulfill your expectations for you. Take a moment and practice the idea that to give is to receive, and practice that with little or no expectations and see what happens! Your happiness is in your own hands; make that statement your working reality! Our next set of exercises will give you the tools to recognize where you hold the most power to improve your life and better live up to your own self-determined standards.*

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## CHAPTER 15

# Changing Perspective

*“One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life: that word is love.”*

– Sophocles

All humans have a certain level of self-limiting (some would call them “negative”) emotions and thoughts. People’s personal acceptance of these self-limiting and sometimes self-destructive emotions varies. Before an eventual overload occurs, most individuals can handle a relatively high degree of discomfort caused by these emotions making it possible to remain in this state for years. You may be someone on the edge of the abyss, staring at the future, feeling overwhelmed. But there is a remedy. Remember the brain can only consciously process one thought or concept at a time. Therefore, we will constantly encourage you to move in a positive direction, one thought at a time, slowly and consistently creating a self-expansive (or “positive”) neuroplastic change in your brain.

The axiom-based self-analysis process you will soon undertake is the foundation for proactive change and also a knowledgeable progression away from chosen fear, anxiety and depression. This analysis will bring into focus your habits, emotions and thoughts that have kept you imprisoned and will also emphasize a thorough understanding of those aspects of your life that have brought great emotional strength, satisfaction and productivity into your life. To decide not to change your negative thoughts would be illogical at this point. Still further on, the Life Movements Module will give you all the tools necessary to rebuild your entire life from the ground up. You will be shown a method to replace those old habitual destructive emotions and thoughts with

positive problem-solving capability and increased self-confidence, and you will be shown how to drive positive progress in the future to levels never before experienced. This is not speculation. Bear in mind that more than two thirds of our guests who complete this program move on with their lives to happier futures.

This is a real plan, with real tools, based on self-evident truths, quality science, and common sense. First, you need to know that you are not only the master of your world (your external sphere of influence), but also that you are the master of your emotions (your internal world). Many individuals believe that they are guided, even ruled by their episodic, self-destructive, reactive emotions. Mastering our moods and your feelings is not a mystical process. Once you understand how emotions, your mind, and your soul interact, you will feel empowered over the pain that naturally occurs in the human condition.

This is the first of three short chapters devoted to building an understanding of how human beings develop from the inside. Let us start with a topic we are all familiar with, physical and emotional pain.

## **Physical Pain & Emotional Pain – Internal Systems of Communication**

In the physical realm you have nerve endings that tell you when your physical body is damaged. These nerves

are mechanisms for self-preservation. They tell you to fix what is wrong. Poke a hole in your body and it hurts. The pain tells you “Plug the hole before you bleed to death!” Our emotions are no different. Emotions are the nerve endings of the mind (and/or the “soul” if you have a religious background). They are a guide to both the conscious and unconscious mind, constantly driving you to a more joyful state. This concept is easy to understand, but those who choose to ignore the benefits of personal change end up missing the greater levels of happiness that could be theirs. They allow their mind to create choices that keep them in a state of emotional pain. Keeping this emotional pain is no different than consciously deciding to continually irritate a physical wound but knowing all the while that you could bandage the physical wound, allow it to heal and no longer experience the pain. Why, then, would anyone choose to ignore emotional pain? Why not fix it, allow it to heal and be free of emotional pain?

The system of our emotions is really quite remarkable. If you feel depressed, change the things that make you that way. If you feel guilty, change the things that make you feel that way. For those who fail to listen to their bodies and emotions, the path of life can become a continuous source of pain. The responsibility to produce healthy outcomes is abandoned and, because of this decision to avoid responsibility, people then decide that they are victims of uncontrollable circumstance. What actually happens is that they fail to listen to the obvious telltale signs of emotional pain and continue down paths of poor choices. Instead of looking for new ways to correct their life problems, they avoid the subject by using repetitive and ultimately self-destructive behaviors. This avoidance only brings about more pain and more torment. Responsibility is a frightening word at this particular stage. Consequently, they live with relentless anxiety.

Changing your life does not mean you are losing anything. You are simply replacing your current self-limiting choices with more self-expansive opportunities.

The human spirit, life force, or soul as some would call it, cannot accommodate a void for the simple fact that it does not have an “off” switch (neither does the mind or consciousness). Remember that people always move in the direction of what they believe will bring them the greatest happiness in every moment of their lives, even new activities and habits that may be just as painful as the previous ones; how sad and unnecessary. People who replace one negative choice with another equally limited choice do so because they think it will give them a new benefit, only to find the same loneliness and pain as before. The wife who goes from one romantic affair to another sees this choice as positive for her or she would not do it. From the perspective of an outside observer,

this set of repetitive choices may seem hurtful or even stupid. But this woman perceives her next affair as her best opportunity for happiness so she goes forward with her choice. At any time she can stop, reevaluate, look for alternatives, and move in another direction. People can and do frequently change their choices. You can too!

Your job in this program is to create and/or choose new options that may at first require a leap of faith and courage, but will result in greater sustainable levels of satisfaction. For example, the woman with multiple damaging relationships might want to think about letting go of these relationships for a period of time and concentrating on a new career or some other deferred gratification challenge. This choice would be a way to create new self-confidence and self-esteem, thus negating the desperate attention-seeking behavior that has been so negative for her self-image. As she gains new confidence in her career choice, she begins to let go of the feeling of worthlessness and nagging loneliness that has haunted her. But first she has to make her decision. Does she exchange the instant, but fleeting, gratification she knows she can receive with a new relationship for the deferred, but permanent, gratification of building personal confidence?

This pattern can be seen in people who go from one unfulfilling hobby to another, or one fad diet to another, or one favorite drug to another and the list goes on. Usually, the new behaviors they choose are expedient and provide the most relief for the least amount of personal change and effort. Self-limiting patterns continue and they eventually deepen the neuroplastic roots of these choices. The people then feel the desperate need to search for another set of habits to bolster their flagging spirits. Usually, these troubled people do not stop to ask themselves if their new plan is any better than the previous one that brought them so much misery.

## Time to Analyze, Time to Let Go

Isn't it time to think carefully and faithfully about the future and set new goals? Today is the day to say, “Yes, I am going to change things.” Thinking new thoughts will cause your life to take on new direction. This new thinking then becomes a part of your new self-image. Although you may have labeled yourself with negative thoughts in the past, you can now let go of all your negativity. Transform yourself by making the process of change a part of who you are. “I am a limitless person capable of adapting to every challenge, overcoming every adversity and actively solving all of my problems. I have the ability to control my destiny.”

You must remember that people who have converted their lives from misery to happiness have done it by choice and then followed through with action. If they can do it, so can you!

## An Exercise in Personal Perspective

Many people's belief systems are based on certain "thinking traps" that they themselves create. In the following description of general traits of the unhappy person, you may find some that apply to you and others that do not. Please don't be offended by the direct language used to describe these behaviors. CBE® Exercise: Highlight the statements below that apply to you.

- I typically seek quick fixes and instant gratification.
- I am distrustful and actively search out the defects in the people around me, rather than look for the good.
- I am a firm believer in satisfying my own needs, often at the expense of others. However, if confronted about my selfish behavior, I deny it.
- On those few occasions when I do accept responsibility for my self-centered motives, I may ignore it and move on or I may feel superficial remorse and self-serving self-pity.
- There are many different things that satisfy me temporarily, such as possessions, relationships, (positive and/or negative), hobbies, money, physical or intellectual abilities, negative philosophies, drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, unhealthy eating and smoking, etc.
- While I have been spending my time trying to acquire more possessions, I have not looked at how and why I do this. Nor have I tried to seek out the changes that are necessary if I am to solve my problems.
- I pile up chaos like trophies and maintain a constant level of mayhem and drama with those around me to conceal the changes in my life that need to be made and also to deflect my need to remedy my immature actions. Changing is the one thing I seem to avoid, no matter how empty and difficult my life may seem.
- I avoid change because it makes me uncomfortable. I have a fundamental belief that known gratification, no matter how fleeting and costly, is more fulfilling

than the unknown gratification that may take time to create and nurture. In short, I prefer instant gratification to the benefits of deferred, labor-intensive gratification.

■ Laziness causes the procrastination that is delaying my fulfillment, greater sense of purpose, and happiness. I know that people move on to better things, yet I convince myself that I am different, or I reinforce the idea that it is too late in life to attempt to change and tackle new purpose driven activities. I remain "stuck" and reinforce this state with shame and/or self-pity.

Let's now review some basic behaviors that illustrate commonly held poor choices so you can take an honest look at yourself.

Again, please use your highlighter pen to identify all the items in the following paragraphs that apply to you.

Only highlight those statements that are true for you. For instance, the first line states, "You live your life in conflict with people and situations." If this is true, highlight it. If not, don't. In other words, do not think we are encouraging you to believe something about yourself that isn't true. You should ignore everything that you do not highlight.

- You live your life in conflict with people and situations. Even though you take an active role in these conflicts, you blame the others involved, and convince yourself that your role in the conflict is righteous. You even convince yourself that your motives are good and honorable. These conflicts combined with your misguided motives make you absolutely miserable because, in the end, you actually believe you are getting the short end of the stick, further reinforcing your victim mentality.
- This thought process is, of course, distorted. However, at this point in your life, it is how you view things. You live your life according to your own views. You manipulate others and endlessly force them to see your point of view. Even if you can get them reluctantly to agree to see things your way, they are disgusted by your immature compulsion to be right and slowly (sometimes not so slowly) move away from you. Because you push people to see things your way, those around you eventually become annoyed and resentful. They don't react the way you want them to and they refuse to play your immature games. You get angry and self-pitying when these people begin to move farther and farther

away from you. You feel your self-pity and anger are justified and you continue to blame the world for your misery.

■ You become so entrenched in your own way of thinking that you actually begin to believe that you, alone, are right and that everyone else is either wrong or just doesn't understand. Your world becomes increasingly small and paranoid. Your life is not, and cannot, be fully satisfying if you are constantly expecting things from people and society that they can't, or refuse, to give you. The result of this type of living is total frustration.

■ Often your actions hurt or repel people. If you are lucky, the people closest to you will stay by your side through thick and thin. But, even when they do, there are typically so many resentments that relationships are barely surviving. This is true of many families in which one or more of its members fail to mature.

■ When you speak, it is more important to you that others understand you and your point of view? This is characteristic of someone who emotionally takes from others. People, by their nature, can only be around a "taker" for so long. A "taker" will continue to ask for more time and understanding and demand too much from those around them. The results of this behavior are continued frustration and misery.

■ Once you realize that pushing people around does not get the results you want, you may switch tactics. You might become exceptionally nice for a change. Younger people are usually very good at using this method, as are those in marriages or any close relationship. You appear to become a "giver," but this, of course, is just another technique for getting your own way because your motives are, at least partially and secretly, self-based.

■ You are not giving or caring because that is the right way to behave; you are giving or caring as a way to manipulate. You have not matured to the point where you are being good just to be good or kind just to be kind. You are trying to get your way and look good at the same time. You want to make sure everyone likes you by seeing how good you've become. You also want to make sure you get exactly what you want from a particular person or situation. People who use this charade to get their way are the same people who continually complain that life has screwed them over and believe they are victims of circumstances beyond their control.

■ You seek out a therapist or counselor who will agree with you. If a therapist goes against your

"caring" self-image or gives unwanted advice, you will usually change therapists.

If you highlighted some of the above list, it will become much easier to change those aspects about yourself. This short chapter is designed to start you thinking in more detail about your manner of thinking. How do you perceive yourself and those around you? Take time with the list to ask yourself how those items you highlighted affect your life. Do they hamper your happiness? Do they add value to how you experience others around you? Do these thinking traps limit the happiness in your relationships and/or marriage?

You can reference both lessons above as you work in the future to better yourself. We have found that sometimes people will repeat past offensive and hurtful behaviors, but then recognize this when they review the list and realize that they need to work more on changing those behaviors. Remember though, that the goal is to eventually change so much that these habits become a distant thing of the past.

Let's now move on to a discussion on human suffering. This is a part of the human condition that is truly difficult and needs an appropriate presentation before you move forward on your self-analysis exercises later in the program.

## CHAPTER 16

# Dealing with Human Suffering

*Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it.*

– Helen Keller

Millions go through life and never ask themselves why their quality of life is not what they want it to be, and they reluctantly and sadly accept their circumstances as “just the way it is.” They ignore the obvious suffering they have chosen to endure and quietly accept their lack of joy. We have spent time with so many people who were tired, frustrated and angry, but who were only too willing to defend their ways of dealing with life circumstances in self-defeating and self-limiting ways. They were unwilling to even try to think differently. We have explained to thousands how their frustration, stress, and anger were slowly killing them, only to be rebuked and told we did not understand their plight.

While it is true that we may not have fully understood their troubles, change, any change, is far and away better than staying in a quagmire of hatefulness, unhappiness, and ill will. Most emotional pain can be averted or changed with a commitment to positive thoughts and actions. We have spent many of the previous chapters addressing this proactive strategy. Learning to gain factual knowledge on how humans can be proactive is an effective method to avoid unneeded suffering.

There are situations where people are thrust into negative situations over which they have little to no control, and they genuinely suffer. In our society we expect “bad” people to suffer in life but we find it difficult to understand when “good” people must endure tragedy through no fault of their own. The fact that life wields its pain indiscriminately towards those who don’t deserve it can

be a hard pill to swallow. In the final analysis though, it is how people decide to deal with such injustices that determines the extent to which they experience pain or suffering, or even if they manage to derive some small level of relief or pleasure.

We have spent much time in this text on how to be proactive to avoid many of the pitfalls that exist in life and, in most situations, how suffering can be averted. But sometimes life throws a curve ball and no matter how fast and talented the batter is, we get hit with the ball.

Some suffering is inevitable. And if it is extreme, it can buckle one’s spirit and temporarily place them into a state of hopelessness. This program opens new doors, but there are times when options are truly limited by circumstances beyond one’s control. A case of terminal illness might be a good example. And of course, that particular set of circumstances may cause great pain and suffering. It is at these moments when people are forced to think in a manner that they may never have before. They may need to search internally for a source of mental and emotional strength that they have never had to previously.

Let’s say a loved one meets an untimely death and those left behind are devastated. There is nothing that can be done to undo or change the event. Those left behind may feel shock, anger, sadness, and ultimately, if emotions are left unchecked, a sense of hopelessness. This is suffering at its worst. While some who were close to the deceased

may rebound following a period of mourning, others may be consumed by their grief. They may decide to see no way out of it. So the question becomes how can a person accept the permanence of the loss, accept the grief, and then move on with life?

First, we must understand what we actually have control over. As overwhelming as grief can be, it is nonetheless a manifestation of the mind. And we are always able to choose our thoughts.

This is an important fact.

Deciding how to face and live with our suffering can make the suffering far less painful and end sooner.

Thinking optimistically about suffering can, paradoxically, create a sense of renewed strength and happiness. Optimism about the future can relieve the current burden of sorrow. It offers comfort with the thought that “eventually everything is going to be all right.”

By saying this we are not overlooking the fact that a terminal illness, for instance, will usually not reverse itself. We are not whistling in the dark. What we are describing is the beginning of a state of mind that can make a black day look a bit brighter by mentally creating a positive attitude. This act alone has the power to defeat depression and hopelessness. A positive attitude allows for a brighter outlook and progress can become a realistic possibility. In the case of the terminally ill the definition of progress might be a smile or two in the last days rather than predominant tears and sadness. This can be world changing for those near the sufferer.

Thinking in this specific manner is the process of thinking faithfully. Thinking faithfully is not a religious term, but rather simply thinking positively when the current facts of the situation give you no reason to do so. The individual can begin to climb out of the dark, dank, depths of depression by mentally manufacturing happy strategies. Then the person must act out their faith through physical actions and further faithful thinking. In the case of those grieving, faithful thinking is the first step to life after loss.

Let's look at how to ease the pain of those difficult life situations over which we have little or no control. First, you must not feel singled-out by your suffering. It is a part of the human experience. Feeling alone and isolating from friends and loved ones just extends the period of grief and pain, keeping it in the forefront of your mind. In a state of shock and deep sorrow, a person may sit and wonder how and why this situation could have happened. A person may be angry, may feel a deep loneliness, may feel like a failure, or may feel abandoned and lost and/

or disconnected from others. This feeling becomes reality the longer the individual chooses to remain in isolation. Sometimes immediately upon learning of a tragic situation a person needs to “disappear” for a little while to emotionally decompress. This is quite normal. What we are talking about, however, is prolonged isolation that leads to a feeling of being lost to one's self. While immersed in a stressful, deeply painful experience, it is normal to experience irrationality and a dulled sense of

your surroundings. Hiding in shame (as was described in the previous chapter) for long periods of time does nothing but isolate the already depressed person.

“ We would not be human if we did not feel the pangs of suffering. Once you accept that you are in pain, the natural question becomes, “what's next?” ”

You are not the first person to feel cut-off, emotionally crushed, or to have lived in a state of suffering. You are not the first person to be unexpectedly sick, divorced, or broke. You are not the first to be looking at long-term incarceration, to find out of a spouse's affair, or to be told that their children (or parent's) dislike them, etc. You are one of billions who have felt the painful sting of unsolicited suffering. So now decide that self-pity will no longer consume you. Force yourself to be with other people. That simple initial human contact halts the downward spiral of depression. Then progress can start.

Once around others, create faithful thoughts. Know that you are never alone in your suffering and that many throughout mankind's long history have struggled just as you have, and that they triumphed. They overcame their struggles, prevailed and found fulfillment. So can you!

Through each phase from shock to acceptance, people can decide to be strong. They may have moments of near hopelessness but still find the strength to survive another day. Thoughts are within the mind and cannot be created by outside circumstances unless, of course, a person so chooses. Happiness can exist in seemingly hopeless landscapes. But it is relative happiness, certainly not the type you experience when things are going great. Sometimes happiness is finding the inner strength to go on living in spite of physical pain, the reality that their mate will no longer be with them, or the injustices of the human condition still upon them. Yet, they decide to remain dignified and find humor. These emotions break the iciness of depression, not allowing it to numb the spirit. Holding on to these positive emotions might be the first step of faithful thinking to stay resilient in such dark times. Remember that the quality of one's happiness is relative to moments in time and circumstances and, if circumstances are brutal, dignity and resiliency are the elemental forms of happiness, even in terminal situations.

However, if hopelessness is allowed to build momentum, people may begin to contemplate the meaning of their life. This, too, can grow into depressive and suicidal thoughts. The ill-fated circumstances themselves seem to scream that the meaning of their life is suffering, so these thoughts are counterproductive. This leads to mental negativity, a “snowball effect,” that we can unfortunately then choose to amplify. It is our perceptions, i.e. how we decide to think about the circumstances, that make the hillside steep and make the rolling negative snowball grow larger and larger, gaining momentum and speed until it eventually tumbles off the cliff into a deep depression. But that’s not the whole story. We can change the way we think and we can reverse a deepening depression immediately with the decision to choose faithful thoughts rather than our doom-saying prophecies. Self-talk is powerful and is the source of our entire internal world. You get to choose that world no matter what the circumstances. Are you dedicated to positive self-talk or to negativity?

The suffering cycle that is caused by legitimately uncontrollable circumstances begins to reverse itself once a person accepts it and lets go of the loneliness associated with feeling so sad. We would not be human if we did not feel the pangs of suffering. Once you accept that you are in pain, the natural question becomes, “what’s next?” For those in circumstances beyond their control, a paramount shift in perception is needed. Again, sometimes, deciding to accept suffering with dignity and grace is the only option for achieving a relative sense of happiness, especially in cases of terminal illness or any situation with no immediate positive outlook.

As Viktor E. Frankl, the noted Austrian psychiatrist and WWII concentration camp survivor, stated in his book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*,

*“We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one’s predicament into a human achievement. When we are no longer able to change a situation – just think of an incurable disease such as inoperable cancer – we are challenged to change ourselves. (p. 112)*

Dr. Frankl also describes what he means by changing ourselves in unchangeable circumstances as he recounted a day in the Dachau death camp.

*What was really needed was a fundamental change in our attitude about life. We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had*

*to teach the despairing men, that it did not matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life-daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets forth for each individual. (p. 76)*

For those in unchangeable circumstances, bearing their suffering with dignity and with as much humor as possible may be their only control, and therefore the only happiness they can find during such demanding times. Situations, circumstances and the body may fail (as Dr. Frankl experienced with such ferocity), but attitudes and thoughts are each person’s responsibility and cannot be hurt or destroyed or even influenced without their express consent (as Dr. Frankl decided for himself with even greater dedication). No outside factors, no matter how dark and sinister can affect people unless they accept them into their thoughts and emotions. This Dr. Frankl made clear in his book over and over again – his captors could not take his thoughts! They could take his food, his clothing, his health, his every possession, but his mind remained free. We all have that ability; it is our natural right from birth.

In the final analysis, even seemingly hopeless situations are not so hopeless after all. Most times people must weather the initial storm to reach brighter days ahead. When things are darkest, people have the power of personal responsibility from within to make hopeless situations hopeful. While you may not always get to decide what suffering you must bear, you do get to decide how you will bear it. Will you do it with courage, with dignity, and with humor, or will you choose to let fate run you into the ground? It is up to each person to choose for themselves.

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## CHAPTER 17

# Interconnectedness, Emotions and Morality

*“You can be the captain; I will draw the chart;  
sailing into destiny; closer to the heart.”*

– Rush, *Closer to Heart* (1977)

Most people never question why we humans feel the things we do. Looking just beyond the surface of your normal daily thoughts and learned habits is an empowering and illuminating personal reality. This reality allows for you to change your mind about your relationship to the rest of the world and how to improve that bond. It allows you to better control your thoughts and thus your actions. In light of these facts, understanding how humans tend to be interconnected, both mentally and emotionally, is of paramount importance if we are to enjoy a more fulfilled life.

Have you ever wondered why emotions such as anger and hate not only hurt the person who is the object of the anger or hate, but also the person who is harboring these negative emotions? Why is it that when we show love to another that we also experience the positive feeling of love? The answer to both questions is based in the interconnected nature of humans. As we cohabitate, we experience life with each other, and in this social experience it is nearly impossible to be emotionally and mentally totally separate from all others. It is simply a part of our nature to quickly learn empathy and compassion (especially if these human attributes are provided as children, they are more easily absorbed into the consciousness and become “second nature”). Unfortunately, we have equal ability to learn hate and to hurt others. Both sides of the human experience are, after all, the essence of free will.

For centuries various religions across the globe have described the interconnected nature of the human experience as a “soul bond” or other similar terms to describe our mystical or spiritual closeness as a species. Science describes this closeness to each other in different, more physical terms. For instance, various brain structures such as mirror neurons are believed to process our conscious feelings of learned empathy. (Lehrer) In other words, our brain is structured to process the thoughts of “what it must be like in someone else’s shoes.” Because of this awareness of other’s feelings and needs, we are able to cohabitate on a high level of closeness. The flip side of course is the immense responsibility this fact holds. Should we love others, we too will feel love. If we harm others, then we too are likewise harmed. This is simply why hating or resenting hurts both parties involved. Expressed emotions are never one-way roads. As humans we truly are a continuous reflection of our thoughts; the unavoidable consequence of whatever we decide to feel for others is always felt by us.

Let’s explore this idea of human interconnection through an example. The interconnected nature of human beings has been documented in death sentence cases in which the murder victim’s family is allowed to watch the murderer’s execution. The theory is that in watching the murderer die, the victim’s families can feel good and finally feel some closure. But that is not what usually happens. After the execution, families report feelings of short term satisfaction that almost immediately revert

back to feelings of dissatisfaction and a deep emptiness. That is because as the family exacts vengeance on the murderer, the family is hurt by the act of vengeance itself. *“To me the death penalty is vengeance, and vengeance doesn’t really help anyone in the healing process,”* said Bud Welch, President of Murder Victims Families for Human Rights. His daughter Julie was killed in the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. In other words, if we participate in hurting someone, we automatically hurt, too. Of course there may be a brief, but hollow, immediate sense of victory, but grief returns soon thereafter. This reciprocity of feelings is in our nature and is built into our neuronal structures that help process emotions. There are very few people that are so emotionally disconnected from the world and the people in it that this principle of emotional reciprocity does not apply.

By examining the interconnected nature of the human condition individuals can decide to change themselves and their feelings towards others. Without knowing that love begets love, and hate begets hate, individuals might go through life steamrolling over others’ feelings, always complaining about how depressed they are and *not knowing why*. What a waste!

Because our guests are trying to find more meaning and satisfaction in their lives, it makes sense to examine why interconnectedness between humans is so important. It is not difficult to see interconnectedness at work when giving kindness and generosity to a person who is down on their luck. This decision and these actions make *both* the giver and recipient, feel good; they are, therefore, interconnected in charity, kindness and love. However, many people find it much more difficult to remember that, the same unavoidable reciprocation is experienced when doing something that hurts others. These people tend to believe that vengeance, resentment, hating, cheating, lying and such, can somehow mysteriously transform into a long-term beneficial experience. While it is true that people strive for positive emotions such as happiness, fulfillment and joy, and they see the results of those actions produce the same for both parties involved, they refuse to accept the other side of the coin. For example, some people refuse to see that their resentments, which may produce short-sighted immediate benefits of victory and power, often just as quickly result in consequential emotional pain. Ask yourself, how can hate produce love? How can lying produce honesty or trust? How can some individuals strive for self-limiting choices and then wonder why they remain “stuck” in their low levels of happiness and fulfillment? All self-limiting choices imprison us in a self-limited existence. And, if we hurt each other, we feel that hurt together. Conversely, when we love each other, we both feel loved. It is simply inevitable. These relationships are all joined by an axiom-based universe

that we cannot change or manipulate. You cannot hurt others without you, too, being hurt. Sometimes there may be a short term payoff, but the unavoidable consequence of pain will prevail no matter how much we might wish it wouldn’t.

Humans are, by nature, social creatures. As explained earlier, everyone has neurons within the brain called mirror neurons that break down the barriers between people. The evidence suggests that these mirror neurons are the brains’ structure where individuals process compassion and where the ability to place oneself in another’s shoes is mentally processed. (Lehrer) For instance, if you see a person being beaten, there are immediate signals fired through the mirror neurons in your brain tissue, as well as other parts of the brain, creating an effect in your body of you being beaten. Your brain’s mirror neurons do not know the difference between you and the person actually being hurt. Just think about a horror movie and the effect the frightening scenes have upon you as you watch them. You know it is actors playing a role, and still your brain processes the images as if you are there! Once you become emotionally involved in the scenes your brain does not know that you are sitting at home on your couch. It automatically processes these images as if you are actually the main character about to be attacked by the monster on the screen. Your pulse increases, you become nervous, and you are immediately empathetic toward the victim. The brain structures exist to build this empathy, *even with a movie character!* This example illustrates just how deeply a human being is geared towards naturally avoiding loneliness. *No man is an island...indeed!*

Our emotions have this built-in capacity for understanding and processing what we see in those around us because it is in our best interest as a species to care about each other. We cannot truly care for others without empathy, which is attempting to connect emotionally and mentally with others. Empathy can grow into compassion and then, with enough energy devoted to it, will create love. With love come joy and a bond that is life changing. All of this is based on the effect your emotions have on you and your mind (or soul, or heart as some might call it).

Much of this development comes from our childhood and the decisions we make in our lives as we grow out of childhood into mature adults. If we learned fear and hate, we are in tune with those emotions. The neurons recognize these thoughts and emotions given to it by the mind and are well equipped to process them. If we were loved and treated gently and with great care, these emotions are usually well developed, too. The same goes for guilt, violence, or overly compensated “spoiled” upbringings. This however, does not mean that people

are stuck in these scripts forever. Rather, this entire program was developed for you to learn the freedom you possess to be able to change anything you want to change by yourself, about yourself. Knowing that we are all interconnected, and that what you think and how you act towards others is a one to one correlation to how you will feel, you may want to guide your thoughts towards compassion and love. Why wouldn't you give yourself this precious gift? The choice is yours how you use your emotional nature and how you treat those around you. While interconnection undeniably exists, we have the ability to guide our interconnected nature and use that guidance to overcome habits that harm others and consequently harm us.

Consider: How many people do you personally know who are in an unsatisfactory marriage. This is a massive source of misery in the world. In the United States about half of all new marriages fail, often with tragic consequences for all involved. We know a couple who were living in just such a failing relationship, and they had no idea that they could adapt and change. They had three small children and were near financial ruin. They argued daily. The husband said "She just doesn't listen! I get so pissed!" And, a week before, his wife had said the exact same thing about him. Each was trying to be heard, each was screaming at the other. The only thing happening was that they both were protecting their own feelings and expressing their frustration at not being heard. The irony is neither was talking about the real problems. The original disputes were long since forgotten. Now they spent their days trying to prove the other wrong. "You never listen to me!" was the overall theme, but this was far from the real problem.

In fact, they were both listening, but what they were hearing was the other's anger, *not the actual issues that had caused the snowball effect*. The topics about which they were fighting were far removed from their initial complaints. They had both become too defensive, anxiety ridden, and angry to make any progress towards resolution. Neither one seemed to have the courage to say: "Wait a minute. This is way out of hand. I don't even remember what we were angry about in the first place. I'm going for a walk. When I get back maybe we can try to be honest with each other about what is really going on. I will let you talk first and I promise that I will listen." This simple statement allowed for all the natural interconnection principles to begin taking effect. Listening builds empathy, empathy builds love, and love

builds joy and a bridge to a saved marriage.

Eventually this couple figured things out. They felt their relationship was worth the effort. They learned how to talk to each other; they built empathy. Each decided that the other's motivation was not anger, but rather frustration, and that frustration was understandable. With this understanding came empathy and honesty. They began a dialogue about the issues that truly bothered them.

So what saved this marriage? It was the natural ability of humans to understand the needs of others - interconnection. It was an assessment of what was important to each party. But it was also the decision to be honest and think outside of one's own comfort zone. *It was making the marriage more important than each individual's independent fearful needs.* It was the ability to forgive and the choice to place love above self. It ultimately was the willingness both showed to mature

and adapt to changes in their respective lives. When people live together for any length of time some character flaws and habits can intrude into the other's life. It is unavoidable. Then, the relationship changes,

and a certain maturing process occurs; the act of caring becomes more important than self-gratification.

When people say things with a loving intention, the mirror neurons (as well as their entire endocrine and nervous systems) react. Tempers cool and productive interconnectedness can occur. But again, *people can also be interconnected by negative habits, as the two people in this marriage were when they began the process of reconciliation.* Unfortunately, too many people spend their entire lives being angry and feeling unheard. Because anger and frustration are projected outward, those on the receiving end are immediately put on defense. How could they not be? These defensive habits are learned responses that can be altered and even eliminated, but it takes an honest look into one's motivations and life history and a willingness to change to make that happen. Remember, we are all connected, in either a self-limiting manner that brings about pain or in an expansive, loving way that creates natural positive opportunity and satisfaction. How your relationships are interconnected is a choice you personally make.

“Your emotions are the nerve endings of human experience, the window to your soul.”

## Emotions

We have been discussing emotions. But, *what is an emotion?* What is a thought? Neither has substance, yet they exist. The answers to these questions have baffled humanity for centuries, and, there have been countless religious and cultural explanations offered. Today, massive information-gathering and scientific advancements such as quantum physics and neurology have led us to a much better understanding of human emotion and their development. But, to look at the quantum sciences as a means to understand people is like understanding the internal combustion chamber engine to describe what it feels like to drive a race car. The trip around the track tells the story better!

So let us make this simple: every human being has a brain that processes a variety of emotions, which are based on our thoughts. You know that people “feel” things differently. For example, a boy growing up in the sugarcane fields of Haiti does not feel a day’s worth of physical labor the same way an American boy does his first day on a newspaper route. The difference in feeling is based on events, upbringing, cultural norms, personal experiences and expectations. Both boys may be the same age, with the same basic physical stature, but emotionally and intellectually they will experience their respective labors quite differently. The 12-year-old chucking newspapers at 5 a.m. may find it a real struggle, while the Haitian boy might find that getting up at 5 a.m. to throw newspapers is a joy compared to his daily regimen of 15 hours in the hot sun bent over cutting sugarcane. Emotional responses are, for the most part, learned.

Because we can change how we feel about things, we can see the value of making decisions to have a better quality of life regardless of external circumstances. We can avoid pain by knowing our limits, knowing our values, knowing our desires, and knowing our abilities. This is the goal of your upcoming axiom-based self-analysis; *to come to know who you are!* Once set forth in black and white, you can use this knowledge for setting future goals and begin to guide this ship called life into safer waters.

Our emotions remain changeable and adaptable, *no matter what*. Individuals can decide to feel different at any given point in time. A person who grows up in violent surroundings may have a tendency to be violent or inappropriately anxious, but this does not mean he or she must remain that way. Many who grow up in these

conditions decide to break the cycle and become stellar parents and well-adjusted members of their community. They become a force for change everywhere they go.

Often when people have been severely neglected or abused, they tend to view the world negatively. This view is, of course, learned, and these internal scripts can be rewritten and even reversed with enough love and a personal drive for change. There are, of course, some cases in which a person suffers an emotional split from the norm that is so great that a return is almost impossible. Society locks these people away. The good news is that this is but the tiniest percentage of the population. Nearly everyone has the ability to change, and so do you.

## Know Your Emotions

It is important to know why you react the way you do to adversity, negative circumstances, and what you generally “feel inside.” John was a construction worker, with a wife and four children. When he got home his wife would complain bitterly about his showing little attention or care towards her and the kids. He drank quite a lot, loved his wife and kids, but simply refused to give in to their needs. He admitted he ought to be more attentive, but he simply refused. He avoided family functions and sometimes felt guilty about it. He knew drinking was not the answer and sometimes thought about quitting or moderating his consumption. Still, he felt his drinking was the only relief he could get when he was home. He was quick to anger and felt justified about it. When

asked why he was so unhappy, he would reply, “I’m not really unhappy; I just don’t know how to care. I’m not good at that.”

This was not entirely true. When he made the effort, he was able to play with his kids and bring a smile to his wife’s face. When he let his guard down, he felt relieved. But his good moments were getting less frequent as the months and years passed. His job seemed harder; his health was deteriorating; he felt exhausted and had bouts of depression and self-pity. Worst of all, he was unsure of what to do. Then John found this program.

When John completed the self-analysis process he began to see that he was angry, not very practiced in the art of caring, needed relief, and felt guilty but justified in his drinking. He also found that he was loving; he had the capacity for overcoming adversity and was, in general, a decent man. For most of his life drinking was his perceived

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*While fear and laughter are universal, what people find makes them fearful or what makes them laugh is culturally learned.*

”

solution to life's struggles. It had gotten him to where he was at that moment, but unfortunately dissatisfaction, panic attacks, and a failing marriage were disrupting his life. What had worked in his teenage years and early 20s was now failing in adulthood. He began to feel terrible. The process of self-analysis was revealing to him and he was scared. He became motivated to change.

But before we can tell you the results of John applying the lessons of this program in his life, we need to further expand on how emotions work.

Emotional reactions have conflicting qualities in that they can be controlled, but also are involuntary at times. People have the ability to be conscious about their emotional reactions, or they can react to circumstances with virtually no thought at all. While emotional reactions *are not hardwired in the brain* from birth, they can seem to "run you" when certain emotional reactions are learned and repeated enough. For example, a woman with battered wife syndrome will react fearfully around any aggressive or type "A" personality, even if the actions of the stranger are completely harmless. Without consciously thinking that she needs to react fearfully to every type "A" male in her presence, she will get inappropriately anxious. That is her learned emotional reaction to stimuli that is loud and obnoxious. But, at any point she can become aware of her reaction and consciously will herself to become calm around loud and/or obnoxious men. If practiced enough, the new emotional reaction will become her "go-to" emotional reaction in the future. If people are not conscious about their emotional reactions to life's events, then their past *learned* emotional responses serve as their default reactions.

Another example: if an individual learned to be hysterical about their drunken, violent mother coming home, then that individual will have a tendency to be that way every time mom walks through the door. It takes little conscious thought to react this way. As a matter of fact it might seem "automatic." However, many people grow up in that same situation, and the emotional response, rather than hysteria, may be one of disgust, apathy, anger or any number of other learned emotional responses that become unconscious in the face of the same or similar circumstances. In short, emotions that seem unable to be controlled and seem to be hardwired are like most other things in life, they are learned habits that can be adjusted and changed with enough motivation and effort.

The point is, if you become conscious about how we feel, and why you feel a certain way, you become more able to control your reactions to those feelings. This means you can change those feelings and future events in your life to make the outcome more satisfying. Unfortunately, most people simply react to life, seemingly without any

thought about it, whatsoever. This passive approach makes them feel as if their emotions run them, not the other way around.

Again, let us use the death of a loved one as an example. At the news of the passing of a loved one, a person may immediately react with tears, or in some cases, seemingly uncontrollable sobbing. However, if the same individual were in the middle of an important business meeting at the time they learned of their loved one's death, they may actually hold back their reaction for a period of time while they finished their work. Then they will likely seek a secluded place to cry, later on. This is a perfect example of how emotions are controllable, and usually exist within a learned range of culturally defined appropriate behaviors.

For some cultures, death is seen as a blessing, a "returning home" of sorts to be celebrated. In these cultures there is much less crying. Does this mean these cultures feel death differently than say those in Western culture? The answer is yes, they absolutely do. This does not mean that people always feel death by the cultural norm. But it does mean that the standards that exist within their culture guide most people's reactions of a given event. It establishes the general range of emotional value for each event. In other words, emotions exist as a learned cultural reaction. Within this range of acceptable emotion lies the truth that people have full control of their chosen reactions to life events and circumstances.

Base emotions designed to save people from harm such as primal fear, take more effort to control, but even the vast majority of these emotions can be controlled and mastered if need be. We see this every day in sports such as mixed martial arts, where the natural fear of serious bodily harm and conflict is completely controlled and nearly eliminated.

While fear and laughter are universal, what people find makes them fearful or what makes them laugh is culturally learned (Have you ever watched a British comedy or listened to a translated Russian comedian? While some may see the humor, most Americans do not.)

So, with all this talk of base emotions (we all have them) and the ability to control them, why are they necessary in the first place? The best way to answer that is to put the question in living context. If your son is the star player in an NFL Super Bowl game, and you are on the sidelines watching him be a part of the winning team; what would this moment mean to you if you could not feel it? In different terms, imagine a young girl in a war torn country whose parents were just killed. What value does fear and anxiety play in this situation? The answer: she feels the necessary emotions that can help keep her alive

to see another day. Emotions are there to save people in times of pain and danger and drive them to new personal heights they never thought possible, all the while feeling the reality of the circumstances. Feelings define your life and your experiences in life.

People can create tears, as an actor does for a role, or they can stifle grief with total control should circumstances dictate. They can feel a certain way, and then just as quickly, decide to create a completely different mood. Your emotions can also catch you off guard as your eyes unexpectedly fill with tears or you burst into uncontrollable laughter. *Your emotions are the nerve endings of human experience, the window to your soul.* They exist in their base form as protective reactions to guide you away from misfortune, pain and ill deeds. But they also exist to guide you toward happiness, satisfaction and humor. As a free-thinking creature endowed with such an expansive emotional foundation, what you do with these emotions is purely up to you. You can decide to play it up, and cry too much at things that are simply not too sad, or laugh too loud at things that you know are not that funny as a means to get attention. Or you can adhere to cultural emotional norms and find a balance of average emotional behavior. Everyone has the ability to think beyond the scope of their cultural norms and decide to feel differently. That is the beauty of emotions; they are each uniquely yours and you get to decide how you exist in your life, now and in the future.

Now back to John...

In John's case his emotions were pleading, "Help!" He went through the self-analysis, analyzed his past and present, and then worked on the Life Movements lessons. Subsequently he built a future mission based on his new self-image, his new values and a sincere desire for lasting happiness. The program explained neuroplasticity and the physical components of the brain changes he was about to create for himself and he charged forward. He succeeded in building a new life for himself, his wife and his children. He has a new career, he is financially stable, and he feels motivated and happy for the first time in over a decade. He has changed his viewpoint, his goals, his external life, and his internal thought-driven choices. He is different: he has changed, he has developed, he has matured, and he has felt the joy of living. He finally understands what we mean when we ask, "What are you worth?" In his case John decided he and his family were worth more than what he was providing. He understood the interconnection between him and his family, and decided that by being better for them, he was being better to himself. This attitude changed everything and gave him the emotional power to move forward and succeed. You, too, can have this experience.

## Morality

Morality is the barometer to tell us what is specifically "right and wrong" within our cultural norm. It is not the same everywhere because of differing cultures and differing individual beliefs. Moral behavior is usually learned through a process of maturing and experiencing life in a particular culture. For instance, someone living in abject poverty and following a life of crime in order to survive, views the morals of "honesty" quite differently from those who see all crime as wrong.

In religion we see the same disparities. Some religious people live by "an eye for an eye" while others cope with incessant conflict by "turning the other cheek." Which one is right? That entirely depends upon the individual's personal belief system and cultural norms. The overall concept of right and wrong are culture-specific and even further complicated by each individual's thoughts. This program is not a religious program and is not culture-specific. As such, CBE® is not morally based nor does it include any kind of moral code or judgments.

Around the world there are so many different rules and individual viewpoints regarding morality and personal happiness that, as researchers, we decided to look for a common thread throughout humanity. What keeps the human race moving forward? Where is there positive commonality among all cultures? Is there commonality or are we looking for something that does not exist? Setting aside our emotions, thoughts, and our physical existence, what is the common quality or attribute that keeps humans glued together and avoiding self-destruction? The answer is love.

## Love: The Universal Language

Every positively based religion, culture, or global human movement is based on three basic concepts: love, freedom, and responsibility. We have discussed freedom and responsibility in the earlier chapters already. Every culture has words associated with the concept of love, although the general meaning and expressions of love differ from place to place and people to people. Love is an emotion, a noun, but can also be a verb: "love one another." This force has kept humanity secure throughout human history. It promotes care, reproduction, happiness, good health, and is beneficial to anyone who embraces it, receives it, and gives it. It is the substance of our positively interconnected nature.

Researchers and authors, William R. Miller and Janet C'de Baca, wrote the book *Quantum Change*. In it they

quote a man who had an experience with interconnection through his feelings of love. He wrote:

*The whole thing came together for me, where I realized that there is a universal whole and through it I'm tied to you and to everything in the universe. I saw that there's something much greater than this physical world we live in, and I started asking, "What is real, what is the meaning of life, what should I strive for?" I realized that what was in my mind had been distorted, that as a kid I was formed into something that my natural self wasn't. It hit me that I was tied together with all these people I had crunched and bulldozed along the way, and that being kind to them was super important. (p. 44)*

Stories like his have been documented since earliest human history, and his choice in words is significant to note here; love in all its various forms is super important to the success of individuals and the human race as a whole.

## What about God?

In conversations with our guests the topic of "Gods will" comes up often. The most frequent question on this topic is, "What is Gods will?" First of all, let us address the obvious: the existence of God is neither provable, nor disprovable, and no CBE® presenter could possibly know what Gods will is for anyone else. Therefore, any conversation on the topic is founded in very specific cultural beliefs or pure guess work. The point is this and nothing more: Faith begins where science ends. That said there is nothing in this program that precludes the existence of faith or the beliefs of the faithful. Remember that CBE®'s nonjudgmental presentation methods do not impose any opinions on anyone and makes no judgments or claims about anyone's path to happiness. Whatever you believed about God before you entered this program or whatever you didn't believe about God before entering this program, is yours to have and will not be affected in any way by the content of this program. This program is not secular or non-secular; it is not religious or non-religious. This program is only about human behavior and every human being's innate power to cognitively choose whatever behavior they determine is right for them.

## Practical Application

If we examine the topics of body, mind, emotions and spirit, several things become apparent; the first of which is that your happiness is your responsibility! Secondly, your new motivation of serving those around you will, in fact, serve you. How do you like to be treated by others? Most people want to be treated with kindness, understanding, dignity, and respect. Well, when you treat others with kindness, understanding, dignity, and respect, you are doing it to yourself; interconnection! That's the beauty of it; you have full control over your happiness and your sadness. Love others and you, in turn, are loved. You have control!

Change is uncomfortable and may scare us. It takes real work and energy. Our fear of change and having to work for happiness often blocks us from fully applying these concepts into our lives. Many people who go through this program fall into that very trap, but there is a way out. As much as you may or may not intellectually grasp these concepts, they are meaningless until you experience some results from them. If you have gotten hung up on overcomplicating things, keep in mind the saying: "Move the body and the mind will follow." In other words, move forward assuming the best (remember positive thinking), and you will get better results than if you simply stay frozen in fear.

How do you treat the people who are around you right now? Are you considerate of your family, friends and co-workers? Remember that the Saint Jude Retreat is a social/educational experience, not just a book. This means that your success will be determined not only by how well you understand the lessons, but by how much effort you put into practicing these lessons right now. Many people learn how to have meaningful relationships with others for the first time in their lives while going through this program. Are you using your time to practice being a friend when it's difficult to be one, becoming more social, and challenging yourself by trying to attain new personal dreams? Or are you spending all of your time being a passive victim and generally keeping to yourself, while quietly judging others? There are a few daily habits we have found to be indispensable. Selfishness is one of the main causes of unhappiness, so try this: Give and you will naturally receive.

Be good for nothing! That is, be good for absolutely no reason whatsoever and the gift to you will be the feeling of goodness you receive back. Nothing will help you to understand the rewards of a positive lifestyle better than giving without expectations. Be kind and considerate to everyone in your life, starting with your spouse and your family, and start right now. Do nice things for others

without expecting anything in return. Get out of your comfort zone and spend time doing what someone else needs or wants, rather than following your own desires. It will probably be uncomfortable, and no one will give you a medal for doing it, but eventually you will feel good about

who you are and begin to feel a sense of real happiness. This is Axiom Three and Axiom Four actually working for you: “Happiness is the only cognitive motivator in the human condition,” and “There is no shortcut to sustainable, stable, long-term happiness.”

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## CHAPTER 18

# Axiom-Based Self-Analysis Building the Foundation

*“Wisdom is knowing what to do next; Skill is knowing how to do it,  
and Virtue is doing it”*

– David Starr Jordan, former President, Indiana University

The Axioms, as you know, are basic truths of human existence. When you recognize and use them to your advantage, you gain greater levels of happiness and prosperity. When you are ignorant of them, or ignore them, you may not get the best life results that are readily available to you. It's your choice what you do with them.

Since all human progress begins at the level of thought, we're going to practice thinking in axiom-based terms right now; and we're going to do a great amount of it by analyzing every significant event of your past according to the axioms.

Where did you accept, embrace, and adapt to the inevitable changes of life? Where did you resist change, look the other way, and hold on dearly to life strategies that were poorly matched to your new circumstances? What did you spend your time thinking about in the various periods of your life and how did your habits of thought shape your experience? How were your choices motivated by happiness; even the most puzzling choices? Did you try to take shortcuts to lasting happiness? What were the results? Where did you work really hard for lasting happiness? By immersing yourself in the hard work of answering these questions about your past, you will come to know the axioms instinctively so that using them to increase your happiness in the present and future will be simple.

You must remember this CBE® exercise is not about psychoanalysis or digging up hidden causes to your

substance use or other troublesome behaviors. There are no underlying issues or causes for substance use - the cause is nothing more than your judgment that substance use is your best available option for happiness at that moment in time. You may have thought of many reasons to use substances, but, as we described in earlier chapters, these are not the same as causes.

Every CBE® exercise is designed to reveal to you the power you already hold to create the life you want. Accordingly, the Axiom-Based Self-Analysis exercises will show you how you have created your life up to this point, and with this knowledge you'll be prepared to choose what you'd like to change so that you may maximize your positive experience in life moving forward.

### **Conscious Thinking, Subconscious Thinking, and Wisdom**

The cost/benefit analysis process underlying every choice we make often operates on a subconscious level. It's not always this way though. We can be, and often are, more deliberate and conscious about weighing our choices when we choose to be. Sooner or later everybody is faced with new or extremely important choices which raise the decision-making process to a more deliberately conscious level. At these junctures we put in the effort to review all options and as many factors as we can consider in order to come to a more informed decision.

For example, a young couple buying their first home may go through great pains and deliberation before choosing a house to buy and following through on the purchase. This process could take months. The fact that many may even look at far more houses than needed, only to come back to one of the first houses they viewed, shows the fact that this is no snap decision.

Now consider a seasoned real estate investor, who may show up to the auction of a building he has never seen before and end up buying it in less than an hour, even though it costs several times the amount of the young couple's first home. How is he able to make this decision so fast?

The investor has done this many times before; he is well aware of most of the factors in play and is able to focus quickly on the important factors affecting his decision, at a practically subconscious level. The reason for this is quite simple, he has deliberately and consciously crunched the numbers and various factors so many times before that the process of judging a potential investment is relegated to subconscious levels of thought. Through much previously careful reasoning, he has literally programmed himself with so much information on market values and trends that he can spot a good deal quickly. Likewise, he has carefully examined his failed investments over time, identifying the factors that make for a bad investment. To him, buying a piece of property is like buying groceries to the average person. But should he enter an unfamiliar market, or raise the stakes to much larger investments or have reason to take more care in his decisions, he may decide to raise his decision-making process and analysis to more conscious and deliberate levels.

Throughout our lives every one of us programs our minds with all sorts of information about what we value, what experiences are enjoyable, and how to make choices, principles and beliefs about how life works and more. When certain choices work out well, we take note; when they don't work out so well, we also take note. We are beings of self-created essence; our every interpretation of every experience we have ever had becomes imprinted in our minds to direct our future thoughts, behaviors, and choices.

Using the computer software analogy, we add new lines of code to our software every day of our lives. The result is that when we are not trying to be more conscious of our thoughts and choices, we end up jumping to all sorts of impulsive thoughts and decisions operating nearly automatically on the programming we have previously created for ourselves. Although this can feel like some sense of otherworldly intuition, it is actually the end product of a lifetime of experiences and freely chosen thoughts about those experiences. In a sense, the

conclusions we come to about life, the things we choose to value, our interpretations about the workings of the human condition, and the conclusions we sometimes blindly accept from others become the ingrained rules that we follow going forward.

For the most part, this programming serves us well, as it should. Through experience we build wisdom. But when emotional and behavioral problems saturate our lives, it is time to take a serious look at the programming we have created for ourselves in the past. That is, we may have interpreted some experiences along the way that programmed our subconscious to go in directions that simply are not helpful today.

Again, we need to be clear that the process we are embarking on is not about uncovering a single dark event in the distant past that causes you to behave in ways that are troublesome today. No single event, either now or years before, has the power to cause a long-term pattern of behavior. For something to be a cause, its resultant effect, could not have turned out any other way. Cause and effect relationships are simple when discussing inanimate matter like billiard balls bouncing off of each other, but the story is different when discussing living beings with the power of free thought. In light of the fact that human thoughts are freely chosen and that there are limitless possibilities and reasoning for thoughts you could choose in reaction to any given life event, it is impossible for any isolated event in the past to be causing your current behavior.

What is possible is that you have chosen thoughts and beliefs throughout your life that may be overly pessimistic or just lead to less than optimal results. Every thought and every choice has a consequence. Using the software analogy we remind you of the famous computer programmers' lament: garbage in, garbage out.

The road to wisdom? Well, it's plain. And simple to express: Err and err and err again, but less and less and less. -The Road to Wisdom, Piet Hein

None of us come into life with an instruction book. We arrive with a desire for happiness and we do our best to make sense of life. In the process we learn from our past experiences so that we may predict the outcome of potential choices in the present and future, and move ever closer to a happier life.

Whether you are content with your life experiences thus far, or you live in regret, you have created your unique life experiences yourself. You may have achieved great things and experienced great joys, or you may have suffered great defeats and depression, but it is more likely your experience has been a mix of both. Your challenge is to let none of these experiences, fulfilling or unfulfilling,

go to waste. This self-analysis process will enable you to extract from your life experiences all the wisdom it has to offer. To get the most out of it and to re-evaluate your life experience through a new lens will require a desire for greater happiness, curiosity, and plenty of courage. The positive life axioms will be your guide and your desire for greater happiness will be your energy. You may have had many moments of clarity in the past but now you're going to stop depending on mere chance to improve your life. Instead you are going to proactively seek out and create positive life experiences.

## Foolish Humility

This is not an exercise in confessing your sins and the last thing we want you to do is rewrite your past to fit someone else's predetermined tragic script of "hitting rock bottom." You will not be sharing an account of your life with anyone and you do not need to prove that you are not in denial about how bad you are. Nor will this be a drunk-a-log designed to scare you into sobriety by heaping on guilt, shame, and fear. Remember that our goal is to use the past to develop the wisdom that will enable you to maximize your life results moving forward. Therefore, this will not be an exercise aimed only at negative experiences; you will be giving equal time to the unsatisfying and the satisfying aspects of your life thus far. The reason for this is simple; the unsatisfying aspects, events and patterns, can show you cognitive strategies to be avoided, and the satisfying patterns can show you strategies to be embraced and expanded. Both offer valuable lessons to be learned. You should come out of this process with an understanding of your self-limiting patterns that you would like to change, as well as a sense of those more positive patterns that expand your world and lead to greater happiness.

One poor cognitive strategy people often take towards making a big life change is to view their entire past as a waste. They focus only on their misdeeds, and either deny or ignore their positive moments. Or they chalk up all of their successful choices to dumb luck. This may seem like humility to some, but it's really just a foolish waste and a complete lack of understanding what "humility" is. Humility is truth! To make successful choices and then refuse to learn from these choices would be like painting the Mona Lisa and then throwing it in the trash. In this case, a misplaced sense of humility becomes senseless destruction and waste. You have a duty to be happy about your successes and convert them into long-term happiness by using them to cultivate wisdom.

As much as we suggest that you courageously look at the negative thoughts and choices throughout your life, we

also implore you not to be unrealistically modest about your positive thoughts and choices. Both the negatives and the positives have formed who you are today, both have led to significant results in your life, and both can point the way to improving your life results when honestly analyzed together. This process should never feel like you are beating yourself up. In all our years of helping people, we have never encountered a truly awful person who has no redeeming qualities. If you have nothing good to say about yourself while doing this, then you are not doing it right. We ask you to summon the honesty and courage to look at your positive qualities, thoughts, and choices throughout this process; we cannot do it for you. Remember that you write the script of your own life.

## Motivation

In addition to learning from the past, this will also be an evaluation process. Our goal is for you to get a picture of those life strategies, thoughts, and choices which have led to low levels of satisfaction, as well as those that have led to high levels of satisfaction. Beyond just learning about strategies that work for maximizing happiness, you will evaluate your life thus far and decide how much further you want to reach for happiness. The process will help you to decide whether you want to put those less successful strategies to bed and do the rewarding work of making bold new choices in your life. In a sense, you will gain a clear picture as to who you have been up to now so that you can confidently decide who you want to be moving forward, and then motivate yourself to create the life that you want.

Returning to our previous discussions of conscious and subconscious evaluations, this entire self-analysis process will be one of those times when you deliberately pull the process of evaluation up to a very conscious level, building the new patterns of thought that will guide you into your future. This is self-directed neuroplasticity in action.

## Axiom-Based Self-Analysis Exercise 1: Organize the Past

Your first task will be to generate the raw materials that will serve as the basis for a series of axiom-based self-analysis exercises to follow. In other words, you're going to write down your memories and thoughts from the past. This part of the process should be relatively simple and straightforward so be ready to devote a few hours of uninterrupted time to focus on this exercise. We urge you to be thorough so that you will be well prepared to move on with the axiom-based exercises that follow.

You will be bringing up all the significant memories of your life from as far back as you can remember. It doesn't have to be in perfect chronological order; such precision would only unnecessarily slow the process. This will be much easier if you break your life down into smaller chunks. What have been the various stages of your life? Here's an example of how one guest organized her life:

- Childhood (earliest memory to 12 years old)
- Adolescence/Junior High and High School years (13-18 years old)
- College years (18-22)
- Living on my own (23-29)
- Early Marriage years (30-34)
- Early Parenting Years (35-54)
- After The Kids Moved Out (55- today)
- Some of you, who are older, will have the additional senior years as well.

Notice how she used major life changes to define the various stages of her life. This is a helpful strategy for organizing your experiences. But this example is not definitive and you can break up your life however you like. There is no correct number of life stages to write about. The point is simply to divide up your entire life into manageable chunks that will make this initial writing process easier for you. Now go to your notebook or word processor and create your own list of life stages. When completed, please read on to complete ABSA Exercise Number 2. From this point forward all of the ABSA exercises will be created in your notebook or on your word processor.

## **Axiom-Based Self-Analysis Exercise 2: List Your Memories**

Now that you've got your list of life stages, the next task is to start writing about each one. Start off with one of your headings and begin writing. Writing out your experiences for each time period listed above can be handled most quickly if you do this in list rather than narrative form (but if you prefer to write in a narrative stream of consciousness, go ahead; whatever helps you to get this assignment done).

Here are the things you might want to cover for each time period listed in Exercise number 1:

1. Every negative (or unsatisfying) memory.
2. Every positive (or satisfying) memory.

3. Every change you faced in your life.
4. Any memory that stands out as significant in any way.
5. The beliefs and philosophies you learned/developed at that stage of life.
6. The negative thoughts you had.
7. The positive thoughts you had.
8. Personal accomplishments and successes. Choices that led to high levels of life satisfaction.
9. Times when someone hurt you or you hurt someone else.
10. Brief descriptions of the personal relationships you had at that time in life (friends, families, intimate partners, coworkers, and others you spent time with).
11. Goals that you set for yourself (as well as whether you accomplished them or not).
12. Fears and Secrets, if troublesome, either then or now.

We realize this is a lot. Take this list as a suggestion and simply begin writing. When you are finished writing about a stage, look over the above list again and revisit the stage to see if there is anything else you want to write about. Then move on to writing about the next stage of your life.

This will not be your full axiom-based self-analysis. What you write in this assignment will be the raw materials used in following exercises; it is your foundation to work from. Just do your best with this and complete it. Don't worry about forgetting things; if you do not remember something, it is not a significant memory. Remember that this is not therapy and you are not trying to "dig up" pain from the past. If what you write is an obviously significant memory of a painful event, write it; if there is no memory for a specific time period, don't write it. The same goes for positive events, habits and periods of time; if they are significant write about them; if not, then don't. Use your common sense judgment. This starting point of the process should take you a few hours to complete. Some people, however, choose to be extremely thorough and require more time. Whatever works for you to get an accurate picture of your life is fine. Remember that your goal is to learn and gain wisdom from the past so that you can better assess your current options and maximize your happiness moving forward.

## CHAPTER 19

# Axiom-Based Self-Analysis Painful Experiences

*“Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.”*

— Anonymous

Now that you’ve generated your list of significant memories, your next task (Exercise Number 3) is to analyze these memories in a way that initiates learning and positive neuroplastic change. At this point you’re going to take the raw materials you wrote about from the past in the first two exercises in the last chapter (your memories), and use them to create a new enhanced understanding of yourself and the power you hold to create the experiences in life that you want. You’ll do this by analyzing your past through the filter of the axioms. This will serve as fuel to rebuild or reinvigorate your life, allowing you to joyfully move on from any past mistakes, and maximize the satisfaction level of your choices moving forward.

Remember that the axioms are neither bad nor good, nor do they discriminate. The axioms simply exist as truths of life to which everyone is subjected. When people act in accordance with them, they benefit. When people ignore or attempt to defy them, they may experience less than desirable results. At this point you will examine the ways you’ve used the axioms in your life and the results of either moving with or against the tide. You’re going to start by analyzing those memories you’d classify as “painful” or negative. It will likely be hard work, but the results are worth it.

Simply reliving negative memories and dwelling on pain does no good and only creates more pain. This is because “you are what you think.” Emotions are the product of thought. Positive optimistic thought brings

positive emotions, while negative pessimistic thought brings negative emotions. Still, this doesn’t mean you should hide from negativity. There are ways to examine negative (self-limiting) events and topics that allow for new constructive and optimistic thoughts. This can be your goal while examining your painful life experiences.

It’s important to realize that *everyone* has painful life experiences; *everyone*. While your experiences are your own, chances are good that someone else has had similar experiences to yours. However, people choose many different reactions to these unfortunate experiences, and not all reactions are created equal. Some reactions result in extended pain, while other reactions allow you to constructively move past the pain, to learn and grow from it.

Since this is a process of Cognitive Behavioral Education®, we’re going to ask you to look, not only at your behavioral choices, but also, and primarily, at your cognitive choices (your chosen thoughts) involved in negative experiences. The axiom “you are what you think” applies here because your emotions are created by your thoughts. There are several habits of thought that increase negative emotion. You may have unknowingly been engaging in this kind of thought habit throughout your life. This process will help you to identify it.

The most pervasive habit that can drag people down emotionally is focusing on things that they can’t change. This happens most often in negative experiences that

involve other people. They have a painful experience, and then proceed to focus on another person's actions that contributed to the experience. They resent the actions of others, replay thoughts about it in their minds, and end up feeling horrible. This plays out in three general ways as follows.

## The Three Patterns of Resentment

### Pattern #1: Someone hurts you without provocation (out of the blue), and you focus on the wrongdoing.

It happens; you face a situation that is completely out of your control. You did absolutely nothing to provoke the harm; it wasn't "deserved," and you didn't even put yourself in the position to be hurt. There are plenty of situations in which people have been truly victimized by someone or the universe may have dealt them what could be called a "bad hand."

While you aren't responsible for creating the hurtful situation, it's important to realize that you always maintain cognitive control over your reaction to the experience. You can choose to focus on the hurt or loss that has happened, and if you do; you will continue to feel pain and helplessness. Alternatively, you can choose to move on, forget, or forgive those players involved, thus putting an end to the pain. It's a simple choice that many fail to see.

The authors of this program, like everyone, have experienced victimization at the hands of others, as well as self-victimization, and thousands of our guests have experienced the same. We should explain that self-victimization is when someone who was the target of an act of unprovoked aggression then goes on to replay the act in his mind and think of himself as a victim long after the incident in question has ended. It's at that point that a temporary victim becomes a long-term victim. That is, the hurtful act itself is long since over, as it was temporary and transient; yet this individual takes on the permanent role of victim as a self-perpetuated identity by mindfully paying attention to it.

Extreme cases of this run the gamut, but permanent victims generally become consumed with anger and/or sadness, and they withdraw from areas of life where they feel victimized. For example, the young person who was betrayed by a girlfriend or boyfriend becomes wary of intimate relationships or worse yet, lives in constant suspicion of their current partner. Or perhaps the woman whose mother harshly criticized her while she was growing up is, as an adult, incapable of having an unguarded conversation with her mother. Then there's the guy who didn't get invited to the party that everyone

else in his office went to last weekend. He tells himself that nobody likes him and that he'll always be left out, and now mopes around feeling lonely and sorry for himself. These are all examples of someone taking a bad situation that was truly out of their control and extending the momentary pain of being wronged into self-deprecating pain and self-perpetuating victimhood.

We're not here to dispute if someone was truly victimized or whether they may have possibly provoked the incident. Nor are we here to downplay the pain suffered as the direct result of an unprovoked attack. Nor will we judge anyone's ongoing hurt as wrong or unjustified. The point is that in such situations people have every right in the world to feel wronged, but they still make decisions about how long that negative will last.

Here are a few options for how you might choose to react to an unprovoked attack or situation where you had no control, but were wronged by someone or something:

- You can give a transgressor the power to hurt you for life by choosing to think frequently about the hurt he or she inflicted upon you and by thinking of yourself as a victim. Likewise, if a person isn't involved, you can think that life is cruel or God is cruel, or the world is unjust.
- You can think of yourself as the victim, seek vengeance and be consumed by an event that is done.
- You can think of yourself as a victim and seek justice. Where the law offers remedy, this may be a good option. You also have the option of not seeing yourself as a victim at all, but still seek legal justice for a past unpleasant experience. The difference lies in how much of your mental energy you choose to devote to the painful past experience, and how much you devote to the present and planning for a happier future.
- You may decide to let go of negative thoughts about the past through forgiveness and/or forgetting – and you may decide to let go completely of any thoughts that you are a victim. You can draw a line in the sand where you refuse to continue replaying hurtful memories, and move on with your life.

There are certainly many other options that we haven't listed here, but these are three of the most common options of how people react to painful situations. Our goal is to remind you that following any one of these paths is fully your choice; free will exists at the level of thought and action, and is within your power to choose. It is time to reflect on how you have reacted to unprovoked

attacks and painful events in your life. Where have you focused your mind? Have you taken painful situations that are done and extended them by replaying the memories? Have you made yourself a perpetual victim, rather than a temporary victim, by continuing to think of yourself as one? *You are what you think.* It's now time for you to analyze how your choices have interacted with this axiom to create your life experience. By doing this exercise you will internalize the axiom and learn a very specific application of it that you may find helpful in the goal of creating a more satisfying life.

**Pattern #2: In a situation in which both you and another person have taken harmful actions, do you focus solely on the other person's actions?**

There are times when an individual may be attacked in some way and may feel victimized, but there's a bit more to the story. Although she may have been focused on what the other party did to her, she fails to look at her part in the situation. If she did she may find she had previously hurt the person who is wronging now and in essence set herself up for the current situation. By only focusing on her own actions she feels like helpless victims and creates ongoing pain in her life.

These kinds of situations fit into a wide spectrum. There are times when a person has said or done something they didn't realize hurt someone else and the other individual's growing resentment is finally expressed as a vengeful act that seems unprovoked. There are times when a person is involved in a feud where mutually hurtful acts are exchanged. This feud continues for so long that nobody even remembers how or why the feud started. Of course, there are also varying degrees of negative, resentful relationships that exist somewhere between those two poles. In these conflicts no one is an innocent victim and thus each party bears some responsibility for the conflict and resultant misery.

There is a solution: you can forgive and/or forget the other person's action, which makes sense, because what's done is done and it can't be changed. You can choose to leave the relationship or consciously seek to improve the relationship and right your own wrongdoings. Either approach allows for personal growth and provides a path to move forward. But this solution will never be found as long as you focus on the parts of the situation over which you had and have no control, including the other's person's actions and past events.

The pain that fits into this pattern always involves at least two parties, you and another person actively making hurtful decisions. If you have found yourself troubled by such negative relationships, then there is a shift in perspective which you are free to initiate at any time;

you can choose to look only at what you have the power to change and/or remedy. To employ this cognitive strategy essentially requires that you stop looking at the other party's wrongdoings. If you think only about how you've been wronged, while ignoring your contribution to the situation, then you are making yourself (as a result of your thoughts) a helpless victim. While you may wield some level of "influence" over others, it can be helpful to remember that people are always free to behave however they like. You can't control other people, you can't make them stop fighting you, you can't force them to change, and you can't force them to apologize. Where you wield the most direct and absolute control is over your own thoughts and behaviors.

In a situation where resentments are plentiful and where both parties are at fault, you are likely seeking a resolution and a simple apology to resolve the conflict. Which approach do you think will work better: wait for the other party to apologize or take the initiative to apologize for your own wrongdoings, and forgive them for theirs?

In a hostile situation where vengeful acts are being perpetrated back and forth and you want it to end, what is the better approach: seeking revenge and hoping the other party realizes they deserved it and decides not to retaliate so you can have the last word, or do you stop retaliating and let them have the last word? Even though your pride may be temporarily hurt, in the long run you've taken the negative energy out of this situation, and it is likely over if you follow the second course of action.

These scenarios aren't about what serves the most justice or what you "should" do, they are posed for you to realize that you have the power to shape your experience and provide a path to move on. You could wait for the rest of your life for someone to apologize to you and they might, or they might never. There's just no way of knowing because they have free will just like you do.

While you wait for something that may never happen, you put power over your own happiness into someone else's hands! By taking responsibility for your actions, making the positive step of apologizing and forgiving, you've ensured a positive outcome for you. You've shed both resentment and guilt, taken your happiness into your own hands, and done so on your own terms. The other party may never forgive, apologize, or even stop fighting; they may live with feelings of both resentment and guilt, but you can't control that and it's really not your problem. You can only control your own thoughts and behaviors.

In relationships where negative situations are ongoing, you'll find you have an incredible ability to change the negative course of things by staying focused on your

actions. In situations that are long since done, you can take comfort in shedding the victim identity that is caused by only looking at the other party's wrongs. Looking at your own actions, you can make different choices in the future and avoid wasting more time focused on things you never had the power to change in the first place.

**Pattern #3: People put themselves in harm's way then wallow in thoughts about the painful consequences.**

At first glance, these situations may appear to be pure "victim" situations like the ones previously discussed, but on closer inspection you may realize that you knowingly put yourself in harm's way. Even though you didn't actively create harm (the other party did), you passively created pain for yourself by setting yourself up to be hurt. For example, if you lie down on train tracks your likely to get hit by a train. This can happen in many ways but most often involves close interpersonal relationships.

Once you've known someone for an extended period of time you get to know how they behave, the good and not-so-good. The person may change at some point, but perhaps you expect them to change now, on your timetable and live up to your standards. In this situation you expect them not to do the same hurtful thing they've done to you ten times before, simply because you wished or asked them not to do it. Then when they do it, you feel hurt and victimized because you focused only upon their actions. This is much like lying on the tracks at 8:29 when you know the train comes through at 8:30 every day, but you are hoping it doesn't. Negative employment relationships often can involve this error. You may feel that a supervisor mistreats you or has overlooked you for years, yet you stay in his employ, waiting for the recognition, raise, or promotion which you intuitively know will never come. As time goes by you become increasingly, yet quietly resentful and feel justified in your anger. Your performance may wane which may result in a verbal reprimand that further increases your animosity and resentment. Any relationship or situation in which a person knowingly puts himself in harm's way, and then complains when he gets hurt, fits this pattern.

While you may or may not actually be treated unjustly or hurtfully, your disappointment and hurt is based on your unrealistic expectations and skewed focus on things you can't control (the behavior of others). Feeling victimized is a surefire way to keep yourself from building a better future, but instead, recognizing where you're responsible for the pain allows you the opportunity to do something

“ Taking responsibility is positive and productive. Responsible parties have powers they can exercise to affect the course of events. ”

about it. The behavioral solution is to proactively move yourself out of harm's way – get off the tracks! The cognitive solution is to recognize your responsibility, learn from it, forgive yourself, and resolve to have the courage to recognize and fix these situations in the future.

Summing up all three painful patterns, the common thread is that people can create ongoing pain for themselves by focusing on things they can't change or control. Such thinking is proven to lead to chronic depression (Seligman, 2006). When people focus on what they can't change or control, they naturally feel helpless because, in fact, they are helpless to change things over which they have no control. Accordingly, in order to analyze your negative life events in a constructive manner, we will ask you to look only at those aspects over which you had or have control so that you can make more satisfying choices moving forward.

## Blame vs. Responsibility

Throughout the SJP we never suggest that you should "take the blame" for anything, but we have found that "taking responsibility" can be incredibly beneficial. Blame is a dead end of shame and guilt. It's unproductive. When you take blame, you think, "I'm the bad person." This means that any solutions to your problem are clouded by shame. There is a negative spirit to assigning or taking blame. It often results in negative, limiting labels. We would be far better off expending our energies and resources fixing the problem rather than trying to fix the blame to someone. The process of determining blame is better left to those seeking justice, such as those in the legal system who decide who to punish or seek recompense for wrongdoings. Doling out punishment is not the goal of this exercise. The goal is to build emotional stability and increase personal happiness.

Taking responsibility is positive and productive. To take responsibility is to say, "Here is where I have some control to make a change that will produce a better outcome." Responsible parties have powers they can exercise to affect the course of events.

There is a big difference between blame and responsibility. If you plan on taking blame, then you might be better off skipping the entire self-analysis process because it will only result in self-hatred and depression. But if you're open to taking responsibility and embracing your power to create a better life experience for yourself, then please

continue. You empower yourself and enlarge your sphere of influence by accurately taking responsibility. When done correctly, this self-analysis process will expand your range of options, allowing for more fruitful choices. By engaging in this process with each painful experience from your past you will create self-directed neuroplastic changes that will make this realistic/optimistic cognitive style your new norm. The assignment of blame has its place in this world, but within this exercise it will likely stop the option-expansion process dead in its tracks.

The cognitive act of blaming will circumvent the axiom “your happiness is in your own hands.” You can try all sorts of mental gymnastics to avoid personal responsibility for your own happiness, but nothing can be done to lessen this responsibility. Your happiness is in your own hands and by not recognizing this fact, you will likely experience further unhappiness and pain. By taking responsibility, you empower yourself to increase your personal happiness.

## Regret

In addition to the resentful patterns discussed above, there are also regretful patterns of thought that can be quite destructive. As distinguished from resentment, regret is when you dwell in negative thoughts directed at yourself rather than at others. Regret isn’t bad, in and of itself. There may be times when it’s appropriate to feel regretful, such as when the regret is used as impetus to make a constructive change. However, some people replay a regretful thought so many times that they eventually develop deep damning conclusions about themselves on the basis of perceived or real past mistakes.

Regret becomes poisonous when someone recognizes their part in a painful situation and then proceeds to label themselves as inherently, permanently “bad.” They highlight every mistake or sub-optimal choice they’ve made and assume that this is “just who I am.” They may choose to see a single problematic choice or performance as evidence of a permanent flaw, negatively labeling themselves and stifling personal growth and happiness.

As a light example of negative self-labels, you might go to cook a grilled cheese sandwich and end up burning it. Then you immediately jump to the self-judgment “I am a bad cook.” Really? One failed attempt at cooking one thing makes you a bad cook? Plenty of factors could be involved; you may have turned the heat too high, left it on for too long, or you could’ve been using a stove with inaccurate controls. Any of these factors are changeable. “I am a bad cook” is not changeable and that is the point of negative self-labels: they absolve people of the

responsibility to try again. This “bad cook” will probably just avoid cooking in the future, which is ok, but it gets more serious as the labels become more pervasive. Are you “lazy,” “selfish,” “unlovable,” a “loser,” or a “bad person?” When you create a feeling of regret by focusing on a personal mistake or misdeed and pair it with a pessimistic self-judgment, you can unknowingly rob yourself of a positive future with your self-created negative self-labels.

As you analyze your painful memories, you will surely happen upon some in which no one other than you were involved in creating the pain. With these and with the resentful patterns described above, be cautious not to create negative self-labels when looking at your cognitive and behavioral choices. Such labels only create a roadblock to positive self-change. Remember, isolated events are not evidence of permanent flaws and more extensive patterns of life choices don’t have to determine your future behavior. You can change your thinking and behaviors at any moment by exerting the effort to pay attention to your options and the flexible factors in your life experiences.

Flexible factors are those things that you can change, or that might just be different in similar situations. Recognizing them provides hope for better future outcomes. Here are a few examples:

- Level of personal effort applied to a task
- Level of attention
- Preparedness
- Situational factors
- Energy level
- Thoughtfulness/mindfulness

And there are at least a million more of these. The point is that recognizing what you can control and change opens a pathway to more satisfying choices, while the habit of focusing on permanent pessimistic judgments about personal ability and character effectively closes the pathway to change.

## Expectations

Keeping with our theme of focusing on that over which you have control, we’d like to revisit the idea of expectations raised in our discussion of the Fifth Axiom: your happiness is in your own hands.

When you've been wronged, did you have expectations that the other party would apologize or make amends for their wrongs? Did you expect people to change their behaviors to fit your expectations? Did you expect people to put your needs first? Have you made these expectations so important that you refuse to be happy unless they're met? You have the power to either accept people as they are or hold on desperately to what you want them to be. These two cognitive approaches will have vastly different emotional results.

Everyone has expectations of others, but when these expectations repeatedly end in disappointment, or when you follow them with repeated painful thoughts, they may be worth re-evaluating. You are what you think, and when you think you won't be happy (and will indeed be hurt) unless someone behaves the way you want, then that is exactly what will happen.

At times, expectations can become a way of dodging responsibility for your own happiness. Remember no one has to behave the way you want them to behave. They are as free as you are, and their world does not revolve around your wants, it revolves around their own pursuit of happiness. High expectations coupled with ignorance of this fact can lead to high levels of negative emotions for the person who holds them. This is yet one more way that some people focus on things they can't control, to their own detriment.

Again, as you analyze your life, we'll ask you to focus only on those things over which you have some level of control. A good rule of thumb is that when you're worried about something, there are two possible options: either you can do something about it, or you can't. If you can do something about it, why waste time worrying? Solve the problem instead. If you can't do anything about it, why waste time worrying? No matter how much you worry, it won't change a thing.

Bad things happen in life. Some pain must be endured, but hopefully it passes quickly. Still there is a type of pain

that can be self-cured quickly; that is self-created pain. There are two general ways that people cognitively allow themselves to be stuck in such emotional pain. The first is by focusing on things they can't control or change (such as the actions of others) at the cost of focusing on things they can change (their own thoughts and actions). The second is by creating self-imposed roadblocks to change in the form of such pessimistic conclusions as "people don't change," "a tiger can't change his stripes," or by investing in any number of negative self-labels focused on "personality traits" or "character defects." By daring to recognize your limitless options you will open the door to change. Now it is time to unload the pain of the past while creating new cognitive habits that will transform your future.

### **Axiom-Based Self-Analysis Exercise 3: Analyzing Painful Memories**

Your task now is to take the list of memories that you created in your notebook or completed on your word processor in Exercise 2, and begin analyzing them with an eye to those factors over which you had or have control. For now, you're going to start with those life experiences you would classify as "painful."

Using the framework outlined on the next page, select the painful memories and expand on each one:

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Two axioms should be at the forefront of your mind while completing this exercise. The first one should be obvious: *You are what you think*. By focusing heavily on your cognitive choices (thoughts), the results, and your cognitive options, you will recognize the great power you wield over your experience of life with this axiom. The second one to keep in mind is: *Your happiness is in your own hands*. The format above is designed to help you focus on choices you have made, and how these affected your internal experiences.

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<p>Situation:</p>	<p>Here you will restate the basic situation, as originally written. Give a bare bones description of the painful situation.</p>
<p>Behavioral Choices (Actions):</p>	<p>Here you'll describe the actions that you (and only you) took that contributed to the painful situation</p>
<p>Cognitive Choices (Thoughts):</p>	<p>Here you'll describe the character of your internal thoughts during, immediately following the situation, and over time. You should also question whether you held any expectations of others which may have transferred responsibility for your happiness into their hands.</p>
<p>Results of Thoughts:</p>	<p>How have you behaved, and how have you felt as a result of your thoughts about the painful situation? Describe that in detail here. If your thoughts have resulted in negative self-labels, please mention that in this section as well.</p>
<p>Level of personal control, and range of options:</p>	<p>How much control did you have in the initial situation? Did you have a part, or were you more of a victim? What do you have control over now? What options are available to you now (both behaviorally and cognitively)? Are there flexible factors at play that may enable you to approach similar situations differently in the future?</p>

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## CHAPTER 20

# Axiom-Based Self-Analysis Positive Experiences

*The value of history is, indeed, not scientific but moral: by liberalizing the mind, by deepening the sympathies, by fortifying the will, it enables us to control, not society, but ourselves - a much more important thing; it prepares us to live more.*

– Carl Becker, American historian

Now that you've analyzed your negative memories from your original lists, it's time to move on to those memories you'd classify as positive experiences. Although all human behavior is driven by the pursuit of happiness and thus provides at least some level of happiness, there are significant differences between momentary happiness derived from immediate gratification and long-lasting happiness. Our goal is to help you analyze those occasions of long-lasting happiness in a way that generates the wisdom that will allow you to create even more satisfying choices now and in your future. As you look over your list, the experiences that bring a smile to your face and strike you as happy memories most likely share some common features. We'll discuss those common features and the basic creation of positive emotions and experiences before we explain how you can analyze your actual positive life experiences.

### The Value/Emotion Connection

In our discussion of the Fifth Axiom "your happiness is in your own hands," we introduced you to a cognitive theory of emotions: that your emotions are generated by thoughts. The basic lesson of the theory is that it's not things or events, in and of themselves, that create emotions; rather it's what you think about those things and events that create your emotions.

Now we'll get just a little bit deeper into that principle. One specific type of thought that's important to this

functioning is the process of valuing. To value something is to think that it's important to you. Throughout your life, you generate various thoughts about what is important to you, eventually internalizing a particular set of beliefs known as values.

We realize the term "values" is often associated with "religious values," "moral values," "political values" or "family values" and so on. Some people shy away from this topic due to confusion with such conceptions of the term "values." Therefore we will use the term importance rather than values in this section to avoid confusion. In essence we are referring to what you think is important to you.

As said before, your belief that a given thing (material thing, idea, relationship, activity, virtue, etc.) is important and beneficial is what matters. It is very important for you to gain an understanding of what is important to you as they are the true motivating force for your actions. The fact is you have created a system of beliefs about what is important to you. These beliefs motivate continuous change and self-rediscovery.

Keep in mind that "you are what you think," and whatever you find important will bring you happiness when you do it, acquire it, and/or see it fulfilled. So, if you think, for example, that knowledge is important, you will feel satisfaction when you learn something. If you think that the recognition and approval of others is important, you will feel happy when you get compliments. If you think

that accomplishment and seeing a goal through to its end is important, then you will feel happy as you work to achieve your goal.

You can choose to find importance in anything, and when you perceive that your important goals and emotions are being fulfilled, you will experience happiness. The opposite is also true; when you perceive the items of importance to be threatened or destroyed, sadness and pain can result. It's the reason people feel horrible when something bad happens to someone they love. Love is important to humans. The creation of emotions by your learned thoughts about the world is a subjective process that starts with your beliefs about what is important to you.

Over time things change. In many cases it occurs naturally and without any effort on your part. A good example is a high school crush. As a teen, you may have been obsessed with getting a date with a classmate. You thought that person was the one of your dreams, the one who would make the perfect partner. When she agreed to date you, you were elated. But now as an adult, you may look back and see that she is not someone you would choose today. Maybe your perception of what was important at that time has evolved and changed and you realize they she is no longer someone to whom you would be attracted. For example, maybe she had a rebellious nature that you find less attractive or valuable today than you did back then. People naturally change their perceptions and what they value as a result of the passage of time and experiences. Are you ready to keep up and adapt?

Because what you find to be important is freely chosen by you, then whatever you value can be a vehicle for your happiness. Literally, anything can bring some level of happiness, even those experiences that have little long-term benefit. However, some things, upon reflection, bring longer lasting happiness. More often than not, things that bring lasting happiness are the things in your life that you have decided are important to you. Other things, over time, may lose importance and bring less happiness, while still other things may have only temporary importance and offer only temporary happiness. The following will help you to explore the relationship between what you value as important and the resulting happiness.

## Lasting Happiness

As a reminder, the Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation says that all people are driven by the pursuit of happiness. As you think of the choices and experiences throughout your life that you considered positive or happy, you'll see they involved things, people

and activities you valued. They left an imprint on your memory and often entailed feelings of confidence, love, pride, self-esteem, achievement, fruitful relationships, etc., that extended beyond the moment of immediate gratification. When reviewing this list and keeping the goal of maximizing personal happiness in mind, the answer to the question of what things are most valuable to you becomes crystal clear.

It is not our job nor is it our goal to tell you what you should or should not find important. You are the only one who can say what is important to you. For those who may struggle to identify what they value, we can provide general observations about how people find those things that are important and that provide lasting personal happiness. For example whatever enlarges your sphere of influence and opens the door to more life options tends to give people the chance for greater lasting happiness. Whatever choices involve some level of personal effort tend to create more long-term happiness; "there are no shortcuts to happiness."

Choices and activities that result in giving you a sense of accomplishment often lead to increased self confidence and courage when pursuing future goals and working through new challenges. Choices and activities that increase your knowledge and exercise your mind usually result in a tighter connection to what you find important, which in turn allows you to make more fruitful decisions. Choices and behaviors that result in new or increased skills or abilities can create a lasting sense of mastery in dealing with the demands of your life. Choices you make that are productive, or involve creation of some kind, will enhance your personal sense of ability and leave you with lasting effects that no one could ever give to you. All of these elements contribute to positive personal change and growth that result in a deep lasting sense of happiness that continues, even when times are at their worst and life throws you a curveball.

## Your Happiness Is In Your Own Hands

What you'll likely see when reviewing your positive memories is that your happiest experiences are those where you did not wait for others to provide happiness for you, and took the task fully into your own hands. You will see that massive amounts of happiness resulted at those times when you stopped limiting your choices to what you thought would be immediately rewarded and instead became the creator of happiness. During those times you likely set your sights higher and actively pursued things that you decided were important to you. In the realm of personal relationships, your career or job, and your

home life, you stopped waiting for others to provide and started creating happiness for yourself. Those were the times when you chose to take the first step in creating love and forgiveness in your social interactions, when you stopped waiting for someone to solve your problems at work and instead became the creator of solutions. When you wanted to experience love, you gave it. When you wanted to experience friendship, you became a friend. When you wanted to improve your home, you took action instead of waiting for your family or roommates to do so. When you had a resentful situation, you took action to offer forgiveness. Those were the times when you stopped doing the minimum, stepped up to the plate, threw caution to the wind, and created what you found was important to you with no regard to whether it would be rewarded, reciprocated, or otherwise matched by others. Those were the times when you transcended reactive living and proactively created value and happiness in your life, when you stopped keeping score and just played for the love of the game of life.

You didn't realize the gift you gave yourself at such times, but it was there. Each creative and productive act satisfied

a deep meaning of importance within you, and it kept paying off, and you sensed the payoff. If you put your mind to it, you can sense where you have created lasting value in your life. It's now time to be fully conscious of the gifts you've given yourself throughout your life and recognize where you've created true measures of importance with your choices. By building this awareness, you will prepare yourself to maximize your happiness moving forward.

### **Axiom-Based Self-Analysis Exercise 4: Positive Life Experiences**

As you've already done with your painful life experiences, you're now going to go through your lists of life experiences you created in Exercise 1 and elaborate on each experience you'd classify as either a "positive" or "happy" experience. Again, this is completed in your notebook or on your word processor. As in our last exercise, the focus will be on your own choices. Use the format below:

Experience:	Describe the experience here in one line, as you did in your original list.
Cognitive (thoughts) and Behavioral (actions) Choices:	What thoughts and actions did you choose that contributed to the creation of this positive experience?
Importance Factor:	What items of importance were fulfilled by the experience? In other words, in what way did the experience pay off?

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## CHAPTER 21

# Axiom-Based Self-Analysis

## Self-Directed Change

*“It’s not that some people have willpower and some don’t. It’s that some people are ready to change and others are not.”*

– James Gordon, American author

As we briefly covered in earlier chapters, change is the one thing you can always count on in this universe, which is why it is the First Axiom. Be it an ever-changing physical world, never ending shifts in cultural trends, new societal demands, a constantly molding brain, or the natural lifecycle of every living being, change is inevitable and surrounds our very existence.

Human life seems to be an exercise in constant adaptation to change although it seems that all people have periods of fighting and resisting change - even hiding from it - in an effort to keep things simple. This usually ends in wasted time, wasted effort, and ultimately self-limiting lower levels of happiness. So, although this axiom is clearly obvious, we think it helpful for you to understand it, actively embrace it and ultimately use it to your advantage.

Some people attempt to settle into a self-created concrete unchanging world, a set of behaviors and/or a rigid belief system. But, because change is constant, the results of this life strategy are almost always disappointing over the long haul. Think of all the routinely changing life situations that seem to throw people into disarray:

- Moving to a new town.
- Getting married, divorced, re-married. (These involve major changes for those directly involved and also the immediate family members such as children.)
- Going to a new school.

- Losing a friend or friends.
- Acquiring new friends with new customs and interests.
- Losing a loved one to death.
- Transitioning from the dependence of childhood to independently supporting oneself as an adult.
- Experiencing changes in income or wealth.
- Losing a job - starting a new job.
- Having children.
- Becoming ill, or developing chronic health conditions.
- Retiring.
- Grown children leaving home.
- Achieving lifelong goals, wondering what’s next.

And these are just a few of the common life changes people deal with; the list is endless.

The question is: how do you deal with inevitable change? Do you hide from it, resist it, fight it and cling to the past? Or do you embrace it, adapt and let go of old ways of life which no longer fit in your new circumstances?

Your task now is to look at all the changing circumstances you’ve faced throughout your life and honestly assess your actions. In each situation, assess and write about (in your notebook or word processor) how you were either

accepting and adaptive - or resistant and stagnant. Did you independently initiate change or resist it?

Then write about the results of your choices and actions with respect to change. The instructions for how to carry out this analysis are simple. Look through your original

lists for life experiences that exemplify how you dealt with a change. For example, you may notice in your lists that you wrote about the experience of going away to college. That is an instance of change, so start your analysis by simply labeling the change:

Description of Life Change:	Starting college away from home, living in a dorm.
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Then follow that with a description of the challenges and/or opportunities this change presented as you saw them:

Challenges and Possible Opportunities resulting from the Change:	I was going to meet all new people, and have to make new friends. I didn't really like new people, so this was a little scary to me even before I went. After my first few weeks, I realized this was also an opportunity to re-invent myself.
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The next step is to write about your experience in dealing with the change, paying attention to both your cognitive (your thoughts) and behavioral (your actions) choices at the time:

Cognitive and Behavioral Choices: (My chosen thoughts and actions in this situation.)	Things were sort of awkward the first few days, and I initially reverted to my usual behavior of walking around with my headphones on tuning everyone out. However, I soon realized everyone else felt awkward too, so I just decided to be outgoing and introduce myself to anyone. People thought I was nice, and I made new friends quickly. This was very different than home where I had a reputation as a tough guy because I got into a few fights in my middle school years. People were accustomed to seeing me that way at home, and I had never done anything to change that image. Instead I continued to play the role of tough guy even though I felt lonely and stressed out much of the time.
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Now, how would you sum up the experience? Did you resist change, embrace and adapt to it, or did you even go the further step of proactively sparking change yourself? Did you apply the axiom to your benefit or detriment? Make your brief and final axiom-based analysis of the experience, focusing heavily on your choices and briefly note the results:

Axiom Analysis: How did deal with the life change?	While I was initially scared, I would say that I embraced change and I used the axiom to my advantage. I was accustomed to being the guy that most reputation for myself. I might even say I was proactive about creating the change I desired!
Results:	I became happier and shed my old tough guy image as well as the loneliness that came with it.

Our guest who wrote this example learned that he is indeed capable of turning an uncomfortable drastic change into an opportunity for greater happiness when he looks for and embraces the opportunities presented by the change. The axiom became an effective working part of his life strategy as a result.

Here's another example. Notice in this one that our guest added another section, because it's a currently unresolved change she still wants to address. She wrote about how she would accept the change and adapt to it as a means to find better life results.

Change:	I permanently retired from work.
Challenge/Opportunities:	Free time to do whatever I want, along with a lot of savings in the bank and a pension presented both an opportunity and a challenge: what to do next!
Cognitive and Behavioral Choices:	At first I thought I would spend so much more time traveling with my husband and visiting my grandchildren. But I soon realized my husband didn't want to be as active as me – he said no to almost everything I wanted to do. I got to babysit my grandkids once in a while, but their parents were usually so busy dragging them around to various sports, games and classes that they didn't have time for anyone.
Axiom Analysis:	I had plans, but I never considered whether everyone else would go along with them, when they didn't go along, instead of regrouping and coming up with new plans, or even finding a new travel partner (my friend Marlene probably would have traveled with me), I got angry and gave up. I would say that I simply refused to accept change rather than adapting to the unexpected state of my circumstances. I stuck to my thoughts about the way I thought of things should be, instead of dealing with the way things were. I feel like I've dug myself a deeper hole as a result. I've hidden from change in a dingy little bar.
Results:	My life is not what I want it to be at this point. I'm bored, sad, and now even further from my family.
Axiom-based Solution	Spending time at the bar is ok, but it's not really what I want most. I still want to travel, and I'm gonna find a way to do that. I'm gonna call up my old girlfriends and find someone to go to Europe with me, and if that doesn't work, I'll take one of those group tours. My husband can join us if he wants, but his laziness won't stop me from going.

Both of the examples written above were reactive changes and tied to circumstances. That is, the participants faced natural changes in their lives and chose how to react. But that's not the only place the axiom applies. Many people have had those shining moments when they truly embraced change and proactively jump-started the changes they wanted in their lives. Do you have any such examples in your life? Here is an example:

Change:	I started a computer repair business.
Challenges/Opportunities:	This was an opportunity to be my own boss, and to make more money but it came with the risk of losing a lot of money and the cost of having to put in far more hours over the first few years of the business.
Cognitive and Behavioral Choices:	I was making enough money in my job as an IT manager for a medium-sized company. I had benefits and I felt pretty secure. Nevertheless, I decided I wanted more and was capable of more; so I saved money for a year, quite and started rounding up customers. It wasn't easy at first. I was only getting small paying jobs for a while, but I held onto the belief

	that if I kept at it, something good had to happen. Then I got my first corporate client after almost 2 years of struggling, which gave me more work than I could handle on my own. I started hiring people one by one, and soon had a real company on my hands. We were doing a lot of business.
Axiom Analysis:	I sought out change specifically for the purpose of making my life better. I didn't wait around for a promotion; I created my own promotion. Yes, I embraced change!
Results:	Today I have 40 people working for me; we don't struggle for customers and I make good money. My financial life is in my own hands, which means my time is in my hands, too. I've experienced great freedom as a result of those early sacrifices and risks.

Before you go to your notebook or word processor to begin analyzing your experiences with life changes, continue to read the following discussion on the 4 levels of change.

## 4 Levels of Change

It's impossible to argue with the inevitability of change. It really is a self-evident axiom. We realize that most of our guests inherently understand this and have experienced consciously dealing with change in their lives. But to take things a step further, we want to explain the various approaches people take when facing change. People deal with change in many different ways. We understand each of our guests is at different stages of life and have had to deal with change in a myriad of areas; in some areas of life they have had great success facing change while in others, not so much. That is, you may be at a very effective level, guiding and initiating change in your work life, while simultaneously behaving at a resistant level with change in your personal life. This is important to remember as you complete the following exercises in your notebook.

Let's take a look at the various approaches to change.

### 1. Resistance to Change

Many people who are faced with changing circumstances run the other way. They dig in their heels and try to keep everything the same. The child who graduates from preschool and kindergarten may reject the homework he's asked to complete in grade school. What happened to school being full of playtime? Why can't he still have that? As a result he acts out and is unwilling to adjust to the new demands of the next level of education.

This behavior is usually accepted and even expected with a young child. Most children quickly adapt and mature

- but this behavior is less tolerated as an adult. Take for example the man who finds that his wife wants to slow down on the partying and the drug use as they prepare to have their first child. He rebels, going on weekend benders or drug binges and stepping out for "boy's night" with his friends several nights a week. This sets the stage for massive conflict. In his mind, she shouldn't be upset, because "I was this way when you met me" and in this case he is right. But as he resists this change he will likely lose out on the benefits of strengthening his relationship with his wife and developing family.

Here is another example. We knew a man in the furniture repair business that began to see less and less customers every year. He was barely getting by, but he continued with business as usual; after all, both his father and grandfather had run the business and offered the same services for a hundred years before him. Eventually, he went into debt keeping his furniture repair shop open with only a trickle of business. He realized that his industry had changed and that most people simply threw out their furniture and replaced it. As the price of furniture had come down, repairing it was no longer cost effective for consumers. But he didn't change; he didn't look to offer new services, instead he bitterly complained about how everything is so cheap now and nobody cares about good quality furniture. His complaints may be warranted, but in the meantime his debt piled up, and he had to close up shop. Because he resisted the change in his industry for so long, he had no capital or credit to start a new business. This is resistance to change. Life simply passes you by as you become a relic, stuck in another time that no longer exists.

## 2. Playing Catch-Up with Change

In this scenario you may not see the change coming; and you may not want it, but at some point you realize it's happening, and you adjust and adapt to deal with it. As an adult, you may find that working in your field of interest isn't all fun and games like it was when you were in college preparing for your new career. After losing two consecutive jobs in your line of work, it becomes obvious that the playing field is quite different after grad school. You adjust, put off the partying and distractions and prioritize working, and slowly you build some confidence and success.

This is playing catch-up with change. It's when you're slightly behind the curve, but you recognize your changing reality and find a way to live more comfortably within it. It may also be described as the "school of hard knocks" style of growth. This is reactive living, but still a more mature and effective way of dealing with change than simply resisting or ignoring it.

## 3. Riding the Change

A more evolved way of dealing with change is to see it coming and jump right on board with no lag time or resistance. One of the author's parents is a good example of this. Now in her 70's, she's been an athlete her entire life. As a child and young adult, she was a barrel racer (an equine sport), but she knew this dangerous sport wouldn't fit with her new life as a mother so she took up various new activities. She attended tennis and racquetball clubs and bowling leagues that offered some daycare services while the children were still too young for school. This afforded her the ability to be a full-time mother and remain active. Then she took up skiing since she could spend a lot of time doing it with her family. When the skiing and tennis began to wear on her knees, and she needed something with less impact, she quickly took up golf, and smoothly transitioned to this new joy getting 15 wonderful years out of it. Then as that proved to be too much for her knees, she went back to the horseback riding of her youth. With no children to look after, she was comfortable again with the inherent risks of this sport which still allowed her to remain athletic.

The sometimes conflicting demands of life and the natural changes all people face make it hard to keep doing the same things forever, but she took all of this in stride and has been able to satisfy her love for athletics throughout her life. She rode out the various changes of life, keeping her eye on how she could adapt in positive ways that would allow her to keep attaining the experiences that made her happy.

## 4. Guiding the Change

Finally, there is the most evolved approach to change, guiding it. This comes with a positive attitude towards life and an embrace or even fascination with the fact that it's in a constant state of flux. To guide change is to go beyond reacting to changes that are inevitable and to proactively initiate and create the change you desire. Examples of this are all around. Just look at any innovator throughout history. Or look to friends or family you may know who started something from nothing, by simply listening to their inner burning desire for happiness and doing something to make their dreams a reality. The concept of initiating and guiding change will become very important when we get to the goal setting portion in the third workbook. Guiding change is so important that the entire third workbook and its corresponding text are devoted to it and how you can create your new future. Remember that you can be a force of change whenever you decide that you want something better from life.

One of our friends came from a poor family and his father died young, but he never forgot an important piece of advice his father gave him: If you don't like a ditch-digger's wages, then become the ditch-digger's boss. He didn't do well in school and his teachers thought he wasn't smart enough for regular classes so they pushed him into vocational school where he was expected to learn the trade of welding and get a job working for a local metal shop. They had a plan for how his life would change. He enjoyed the welding, but didn't think he would enjoy life as a tradesman or in the normal route that was expected of him in his small rural town. In eighth grade, he saved up money from doing farm work, dropped out of school, and invested in merchandise that he could sell door to door. He became his own boss. He struggled with many failed ventures, but eventually became one of the wealthiest and happiest men in his community. Even as an eighth grade dropout, he eventually became the CEO of his own publicly traded company. Along the way he inspired, instructed, and helped his friends and family to go into business for themselves and become their own bosses. He didn't let his life change according to someone else's plans; he initiated and guided the change in the direction of his own choosing. He created his future.

Change is inevitable. How have you dealt with it in the past? What were the results? How would you like to deal with it in the future? As we have done throughout the text, we will ask you this one simple question again: What are you worth? We keep asking that because we know that being direct is often the best method for understanding. Are you worth more than being in emotional pain? Are you worth more than depression, anxiety and embracing the fear of risk? Are you ready to embrace change and

gain the confidence that naturally develops when you guide change rather than have it guide you? Are you worth being happier? Isn't that why you are here and reading this? Are you not searching for a deeper meaning to your life? If so, embrace and direct your life where you want it to go. Learn from past mistakes so you can stop the reruns of failure and self-pity that come with choosing inaction. Choose change! Then master your version of it to suit your needs and desires. The world is waiting for the bold you to move forward, and we look forward to watching your self-determined changes bear fruit!

### Axiom-Based Self Analysis: Exercise 5

In this exercise you will go through each life stage in your original list of memories (listed in Exercise 2), pick out each instance of change, and analyze it according to

the format presented below. If you have trouble coming up with the examples of changes you've encountered, then take a look through our list of common life changes (earlier in this chapter) for inspiration. At the very least, the segments you divided your life into with ABSA exercise 1 should represent some sort of change and will provide you with the raw materials needed to complete this exercise.

Now go to your notebook and refer to the following charting format to analyze your experience with change.

Change:	Briefly describe the change you faced. Or, in the case of roactive change, what change did you create?
Challenges/Opportunities:	From your perspective at the time, how did it present a challenge and/or opportunity?
Cognitive and Behavioral Choices:	What was your experience of facing change in this situation? What did you think and do?
Axiom Analysis:	Did you embrace change and adapt to change, or resist and hide from it? Did you use the axiom to your advantage or disadvantage? Was your experience with this change reactive or proactive?
Results:	What were the results of your choices?
Axiom-based Solution:	If the situation is ongoing and the change currently presents conflict in your life, then how will you deal with the change now?

## CHAPTER 22

# Axiom-Based Self-Analysis

## Relative Happiness and Easier Options

*“We should regret our mistakes and learn from them, but never carry them forward into the future with us.”*

– Lucy Maud Montgomery, Canadian author

At this point, you’ve done the hard work of analyzing your part in many of your painful and as well as your positive life experiences. You’ve explored both the cognitive and behavioral choices (chosen thoughts and actions) you’ve made and seen how their effects played out. In the following chapters, you’re going to add another level of analysis that will help you build a path to greater happiness. Your focus for this task will be on the happiness based axioms.

The Third Axiom “Happiness is the only cognitive motivator” goes much deeper than it first appears. The full meaning is that all things that people think or do are driven by a personal pursuit of happiness. As was mentioned earlier, this is easy to recognize when people show love, pursue certain constructive goals, and engage in behaviors that bring immediate amusement or fun. But what about those choices that seem immediately unpleasant or painful? This darker side of relative happiness must be explored in order to make this axiom more useful.

### Chosen Pain

Why do some people wallow in misery over events long past? Why do some people worry about blaming and pointing fingers over problems that have already occurred and can’t be undone? Why do people react in anger while

they know it will likely escalate a bad situation making it worse? Why do people chase down revenge when it leaves them empty? Why do people stifle their lives with defeatist thinking that keeps them from realizing their dreams? Why do people isolate from others, and live in self-imposed social exile? Why do people take on a depressed listless attitude, instead of enjoying life? The answer is that all of these choices offer at least some small measure of happiness for those people.

It’s hard to accept, but yes, people freely choose these emotional states and behaviors for the seemingly imperceptible level of happiness that they provide. Human beings are programmed to automatically pursue personal happiness, but they aren’t programmed to automatically make choices that maximize their results. That’s for each person to manage as the choice pans out. In other words, people cannot always accurately predict the outcome or consequences of their choices. So while you might make a choice to be happy, you might end up quite sad. The basic drive for increased happiness exists, and then people choose how they will fulfill it. The examples above are choices that tend to bring low levels of fleeting personal satisfaction along with negative consequences. Let’s look at what they provide, from the perspective of *relative happiness*.

## Relative Happiness found in Easier Options

The key to understanding the happiness value of “negative” choices is in recognizing that they may be *easier in the moment* than other options. The choice to get high or drunk is the perfect example for the choices that will be discussed in this chapter. When you choose to derive the bulk of your personal happiness from the quick thrills provided by drugs and alcohol, you’re making a choice that is easier in the moment than other avenues to personal happiness that may require more personal investment but lead to delayed, but lasting happiness. Simply put, it’s immediately easier to complain about something than it is to fix it. It’s immediately easier to resent than to forgive. It’s immediately easier to beat yourself up about the past than it is to create a positive future. It’s immediately easier to be depressed than it is to get up and do something to create greater levels of happiness. These choices, albeit “negative”, become relatively satisfying in the moment, but in some cases are also accompanied by immediate and long-term pain. The lack of effort needed to carry out these perceived easier options is what makes them attractive and somewhat satisfying in those moments when you’re unwilling to work for long-term happiness.

## Procrastination

The act of procrastination is the perfect example of a troublesome choice made in favor of relative happiness found through immediately easier options. Procrastinating is when you put off or wait to complete tasks that will require effort to complete. In the course of their self-analysis, many of our guests found that they had created a multitude of problems in their lives by procrastinating. For example, one guest lost his driver’s license because he repeatedly put off paying for speeding tickets. Over time the fines increased and he refused to set aside the money to pay them. He always found something he’d rather spend his time and money on than the tickets, whether it was some new clothing he wanted, concert tickets, or nights of partying while taking expensive drugs.

The relative happiness found in procrastination in the example above is plain to see. He was not happy when his license was revoked, he was not happy when he got arrested, he was not happy when he had to beg people to drive him places or take the bus to work, but he was happy when he initially was spending the money on other things.

You may put off dealing with a tough situation, such as delivering bad news to someone. It’s easier to pretend that everything is alright and procrastinate than it is to have a tough conversation, thus relative happiness is found in the initial easier option of procrastination.

You may procrastinate on getting some important work done. You do anything other than the work, read a book, watch tv, go online, etc., and the trade-off is clear. It’s easier and more immediately satisfying to chat online than it is to complete your work responsibilities.

With all of these examples, situations can get worse over time, but it’s important not to lose sight of what lies behind the choice: procrastinating is more immediately satisfying because it’s easier than dealing with responsibilities, but in the end procrastinating always comes with a price.

## Negative Self-Labels

Upon recognizing a repeated troublesome choice, you may be tempted to label yourself. For example, let’s stick with procrastination. You may recognize repeated choices to procrastinate in your own life, and eventually label yourself a “procrastinator.” Such a label may hurt and be accompanied by great shame in the long run, but it also makes things easier in the moment. The next time you procrastinate, you can quickly write it off - “Oh well, I’m a procrastinator.” This is a quick way to sidestep the self-examination that would lead you to solutions that require greater effort.

The same goes for labels such as “alcoholic”, “addict”, “self-sabotager”, “people pleaser”, etc. It’s easier to wallow in a label that gives you a permanent handicap than it is to get up and change your way of doing things. Thus, it is also more immediately satisfying than the alternative of owning each choice as a choice freely made in pursuit of happiness. It’s easier to think “this is who I am.” Labels allow people to actively avoid the more effortful task of considering other options and acting on them.

## Resentment

Resentment causes much unhappiness; some have called it “man’s mental poison”. To explore this, it is important to understand what resentment is and what it is not. To resent is to have negative thoughts about a person, people, or situation. Resentment is a way of dealing with an adversity on a purely mental level. When displeasure is openly discussed or acted upon, it becomes something other than resentment which will be discussed later. For

now, resentment is a purely mental way of dealing with adversity and involves ruminating on negative thoughts about people and/or situations.

There are a few basic ways of dealing with upsetting situations. You can confront the situation in search of a resolution by trying to find a way to have the wrong righted. You can forgive the players involved and move on; or you can forego the effort and courage that either of those options requires, opting instead to resent; that is silently blaming and/or hating the other party or circumstances.

As discussed earlier, the thin slice of happiness provided by choosing the path of resentment lies in the fact that it's easy. You are relieving yourself of the immediate work necessary to actively deal with the adversity or conflict, and this provides immediate satisfaction. By resenting, you can feel like you've won in a situation, because you know how wrong and bad the other party has acted. You can feel "right," or as an innocent victim, or even morally superior. And in some cases, the act of resenting also allows you to minimize your own responsibility in a situation, thereby protecting you from the work required to achieve greater levels of maturity and thus, delayed, longer term happiness. In all of these ways, resentment provides a modicum of happiness in the moment, but often deprives people of lasting happiness in the long run. So while it may look like a no-brainer to say that resentment is unproductive and usually results in many negative outcomes, *at the moment when someone is actively resenting*, it does satisfy, albeit temporarily, and brings a sliver of happiness. This happiness exists in comparison to more constructive long-term options that require more work such as, confronting a situation head on or by exercising forgiveness and moving on.

Those are the cold hard facts about what resentments provide. In some cases, having resentment may be more valuable to you than actively confronting a situation to find a resolution or simply forgiving, but this can only be judged one situation at a time by you. Throughout this process, you will be asked to gauge for yourself how much bang you get for your buck with each choice, including among others, the choice to resent. You may find some instances in which it is perfectly satisfying, but you will surely find many situations where you can gain greater satisfaction in the long-run by confronting the situation differently.

## Regret vs. Self-Pity

Most of the time feeling regret is helpful. Regret occurs when an attempt to create happiness falls short of its

intended outcome, i.e. when we make a mistake or miscalculate or misunderstand. Regret can also occur when an attempt to create happiness isn't made, such as a missed opportunity for happiness. The point is that everyone has firsthand experiences with regret. We have all done or said or thought things that in retrospect we wished that we had not. So regret, in and of itself, is not bad or good, but rather regret is bad or good based on what we do about our regrets. For example, suppose you take your car back to your friendly neighborhood mechanic for the third time to fix the same problem. Upon your arrival you immediately burst into an angry tirade. Later you think that your mechanic really didn't deserve to be treated that way. You regret having dumped on him that way. So, when you pick up your car, you make a special point to say to your mechanic, "Look, I was really frustrated when I dropped off my car and I want you to know that I appreciate all the help you have been giving me on solving this difficult problem. I just want to say thanks."

In this case, it was regret that regained a friend instead of creating an everlasting adversary. But regret may not have occurred at all, where you decided that your mechanic really did deserve to be chastised for his shoddy work. Whether you decide that your mechanic deserved your wrath or didn't - either way, regret is about what you do or don't do, say or don't say, think or don't think.

Regret is part of life. If you have no regrets it means one of two things. Either you have never thought anything, never said anything and never done anything, or everything you have ever done, said and thought are exactly perfect according to your own assessment.

In any case, some regrets we live with for the rest of our life. I wish I had finished school. I regret not spending more time with my kids when they were small. I wish I had stopped drinking sooner than I did. I regret not staying close to my brothers and sisters after we became adults. I regret not dedicating myself to my job; I could have been far more successful than I am. I regret the things I said during arguments with my spouse. I regret running up the debt on my credit cards. I regret buying this new car. I regret not saying, "I love you" enough to the ones I love. I regret not writing and calling Mom and Dad when they were living. And, the list goes on.

The point is that some regrets we must live with. Most of the time, life doesn't allow us to play a "mulligan," "let," or "do-over." Still, regrets don't have to be debilitating. We can accept our regrets for what they are: mistakes and then move on. We can also learn from them, and resolve to act differently in the future. But if we dwell on our regrets and beat ourselves up over them, it becomes something else: self-pity.

Similar to resentment, self-pity is a purely mental act of ruminating on negative thoughts. The particular thoughts in this case are focused on one's own perceived shortcomings, mistakes, and/or failures. In the face of such thoughts or realizations about ourselves, we face the basic options of accepting the personal failure as a painful life lesson, and/or pushing forward to resolve the problem or perform better in the future. Or we can choose to live in self-pity and shame, negatively labeling ourselves as broken, sinful, or just plain bad. Again, similar to the other choices discussed in this chapter, the path of self-pity saves us from the hard work of personal change and increased effort, thus providing a strange sort of immediate comfort. And yet again, this may provide more happiness in the short run, but less happiness in the long run. Self-pity can eventually reach levels that feel utterly crippling.

Both resentment and self-pity are short-term strategies for dealing with adversity that keep it limited to the confines of your own mind. When you move outside that arena there are other reactions to adversity that also provide limited levels of immediate gratification, which we will discuss next.

## Complaining, Gossiping, and Venting

Have you ever discussed problems with no intention of solving them? This is what's known as complaining. It's simply the act of airing grievances. On its face, it wouldn't appear to offer any satisfaction; yet, like resentment, there is some small amount of happiness to be gleaned from complaining.

As complaining is an act that involves other people listening to your complaints, much of the perceived value in it rests on the reaction it may solicit from others. When we complain, we hope to gain sympathy, express our superiority, or justify our own shortcomings to others and to ourselves. As long as our audience doesn't present us with solutions that demand work on our part, our mission is accomplished; we've validated our complaints while remaining essentially inactive. Then there are those cases in which we're commiserating with others who air the same complaints, and the mutual pity offers a sense of connection with others, which can also be immediately satisfying.

Beyond the satisfaction we get from the reactions of others, however, this habit of complaining offers relative happiness by saving us from immediate effort when compared to other options. When we face unsatisfactory conditions in life, we are faced with a myriad of options: we can take the action to change those conditions, we can

remove ourselves from them, we can face our problem head-on and devise a plan of action to solve them, or we can complain about them. Those first few options involve expending the effort to make the most of what we have in a given situation, or we can take the low effort option of staying focused on all the ways our expectations have not been met. Complaining is a perfect way to excuse our inaction.

Another low satisfaction habit that involves vocalizing negative thoughts is gossip. When upset with someone, we may say negative things about them to others. The purpose is to feel slightly better about ourselves by pushing someone else's reputation below ours. Again, this saves the gossiper the hard work of making their own life better, and offers immediate happiness and false self-esteem in comparison to a focus on self or a focus on solving any grievances. The gossip makes you feel relatively "better than" the person you're gossiping about. There is immediate satisfaction involved, but the long-term costs can be high, both socially and personally, as we forego unseen possible personal change and growth that would occur if we make the effort.

## Blowing Off Steam

All of these habits of endlessly thinking about, discussing, and reliving one's personal failures, negative thoughts, emotions, gripes, and traumatic events are commonly characterized as "blowing off steam." The therapy movement and recovery society actually promote similar behaviors under the name of "venting," and grief therapy. The idea that having patients "blow off steam" is therapeutic comes from catharsis theory, which basically contends that active expression of such negativity through venting relieves a growing pressure that so-called "repressed pain" places upon one's soul or psyche. These mental health professionals contend that if the negativity isn't properly released through some form of outward expression of anger, the person that is "bottling up their negative emotions" will eventually emotionally explode in some way. Various methods of venting were recommended, often physical and apparently benign activities such as hitting inanimate objects; but Freud even went so far as to suggest that anger should be vented by carrying out revenge against one's enemies. (Sommers & Satel, 2010) Less extreme forms of venting such as run-of-the-mill complaining are promoted in 12-step meetings and group counseling sessions. Many of our students have said that these gripe sessions made them feel worse, and were exactly what drove them away from the recovery society in search of better solutions.

The idea that venting is therapeutic was so widespread that it remains a part of popular psychology today, even after much research has found it to be untrue and even counterproductive. (O'Brien, 2010) Venting doesn't release frustration; it creates more frustration. The problem with venting is that it isn't a process of reviewing experiences in search of solutions, but rather that *the venting itself is supposed to be the solution*. The goal of venting is to live out negative emotions, and remember, *you are what you think*.

All of these behaviors provide an intensity of emotion that can be immediately enjoyable for otherwise depressed people, even when that emotion has a negative result such as increased anger. People feel an immediate high from mentally reliving or publicly airing their grievances. So there is some level of satisfaction. There is actually happiness to be found in all sorts of negative feelings, such as fear for example. For evidence of this, look to the billions of dollars that are spent annually on roller coasters, horror movies, and other activities meant specifically to strike fear into people; it's big business, because people actually enjoy experiencing negative emotions when those emotions are intense. The important question is this: does the immediate satisfaction of intense emotions like these outweigh their long-term costs?

Various studies on the effects of venting and rumination show that high costs are indeed involved with this coping strategy. One noted researcher concluded after running experiments on the effects of venting exercises that:

*"...venting to reduce anger is like using gasoline to put out a fire—it only feeds the flame. By fueling aggressive thoughts and feelings, venting also increases aggressive responding." (Bushman, 2002)*

Furthermore:

*"Venting while ruminating about the source of provocation kept aggressive thoughts and angry feelings active in memory and only made people more angry and more aggressive. These results provide one more nail in the coffin containing catharsis theory." (Bushman, 2002)*

The catharsis strategy of venting is tightly wound up with the grief counseling industry, which pushes people toward vigorous expressions of grief, sadness, and anger as part of a "healthy grieving process." In their investigation of several therapeutic interventions centered around venting and rumination, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) therapy and the grief counseling industry, Christina Hoff Sommers Ph.D. and Sally Satel M.D. found great danger in people being pushed into this controversial grieving process when

they would've coped just fine on their own suggesting that it would actually result in added grief and guilt for reluctant participants. According to Satel and Sommers, even willing participants of grief counseling's venting and rumination-centered methods don't fare very well:

*A number of studies have reached the conclusion that grief therapies are relatively ineffective and even harmful to a minority. A 2000 study by Robert Neimeyer of the University of Memphis reported that 38 percent of subjects receiving grief therapy actually fared worse than a matched group not receiving treatment. Reviewing several studies, Neimeyer summarizes that "such interventions are typically ineffective, and perhaps even deleterious, at least for persons experiencing normal bereavement." (p. 138)*

Furthermore:

*"...data have continued to spill out of journals confirming, with few exceptions, that physical and verbal expression of anger is usually self-reinforcing. Nor does talking about negative experiences necessarily ameliorate the anxiety accompanying them." (p. 112)*

In the case of PTSD, elaborate group therapy models that include months of reliving traumatic experiences and venting of grief have been shown to have no benefit when compared to less intensive, less rumination-centered therapies. According to one landmark study, these more intensive PTSD treatments are:

*"...not associated with the achievement of additional gains in symptom reduction or social functioning. Treatment in long-stay PTSD units may, in fact, be associated with some losses in these areas." (Fontana & Rosenheck, 1997)*

Other important findings noted by Sommers and Satel show that people are less likely to actually do the things that would cheer them up, such as going out with a friend, after they've been actively ruminating. Again and again, it appears that venting and ruminating have very little benefit to offer, but can come with many hidden costs. This last bit confirms what we've seen throughout our decades of directly helping troubled people. Ruminating on resentful and self-pitying thoughts, or even outwardly expressing negativity through complaining or other venting based habits, provides only the simple immediate pleasure of victimhood and inaction at the cost of continued negative feelings. The research shows that venting and rumination based strategies for releasing pain often actually create more pain. Think angry thoughts and you become

angrier; as the axiom “you are what you think” predicts.

The point of all this research is that these habits don't usually have any long-term productive value. Yet people still engage in them for the immediate satisfaction that they provide. This is important to the goal of our next self-analysis exercise, which is to evaluate the choices you've been making throughout the various periods of your life and to decide whether they offer you the quality and amount of happiness you're looking for, or whether you might have better options.

Now is the time to experience the power of the axioms to create, in your own life, more meaningful personal change. Axiom number three states that at the core of every human choice is the drive to experience some level of happiness. By looking objectively at the small benefits provided by these habits, we can remove them from the bewildering world of pathology/disease and own them as simple low satisfaction happiness driven choices. You will probably find that many of your painful choices provided small slivers of relative happiness based on the fact that they're immediately easier than your other perceived options.

Axiom Four states that there are no shortcuts to lasting happiness. This helps us recognize that these choices and habits provide short term but not long term happiness. So the question is: what do you want from now on, immediate gratification or lasting happiness?

By looking at your previously chosen thoughts and actions and gauging the level of happiness they've produced, you can make bold, fully informed choices that will bring you greater levels of lasting happiness. But then again, some people may be afraid of such action and shy away from the responsibility to provide greater happiness for themselves. In these cases, people often choose to turn toward more subdued emotional states.

## Sadness and Depression

Bouts of sadness and depression are the extreme side of rumination and inaction. We're going to look at these in a way that is empowering towards change. If you feel your depressive states rise to the level in which medical help is needed, it is up to you whether or not to procure such help. For those readers who are guests at one of our retreats, we will be happy to provide you with transportation to a physician if you feel you need such help. Nothing we are

going to discuss about this topic in the following pages will be a hindrance to any professional help you may receive. The content and exercises can only enhance a therapist's regimen for you.

Both protracted sadness and depression include active withdrawal from normal life (whatever your norm may be). At its most basic level, choosing to be depressed saves us from exerting ourselves. It saves us from confronting the source of our frustration. It saves us from taking the risk of failure in making more active choices for greater happiness. It is an attempt to avoid facing and adapting to the inevitably changing circumstances of life. As we said earlier, behaviors with known levels of satisfaction, no matter how low, are often more immediately attractive than new choices with unknown but potentially greater levels of happiness. The choice to depress facilitates the comfort of inaction in the same way that resenting and complaining help us to avoid change and dealing productively with confrontation and/or new

choices. It's easier in the moment to depress than to deal constructively with pain or unsatisfying life circumstances.

It has also long been recognized that depression can serve as an alternative to anger. Anger has its

own rewards, even if those rewards are the simple thrill of experiencing intense emotions. But intense anger also comes with all sorts of risk, such as assault charges, domestic abuse situations, etc. So as an alternative to anger, there are times when people may find depression to be a more valuable choice. Again, this is a choice made for relative happiness.

Depression and sadness can be based upon a wide range of thought patterns. At times, the thoughts that underlie these feelings can center upon incredibly specific negative memories, judgments and fearful projections. At other times, the thoughts may be relatively nonspecific and simply focused on a general sense of personal helplessness and hopelessness. Either way, they offer a tiny bit of known comfort in the form of inaction or the excuse of victimhood. Rather than doing something constructive to bring about greater happiness or doing something destructive (acting out anger), the depressor simply does nothing, which minimizes personal efforts and risk when compared to choices that would require more effort; *it's easier in the short-term*.

We have now discussed a number of choices that provide the immediate gratification of having an excuse for inaction, and the pleasures provided by immediate

“

*When you are unwilling to work for long-term happiness, the easier option is always more attractive.*

”

emotional intensity as well (even when the emotions are those of anger, hostility, and helplessness). Surely, there are many more subcategories and mutations of these. And surely, there are plenty more ways that the easier choice is used as way to generate immediate relative happiness. What's important is that you are able to see the happiness factor involved, so that you can evaluate the benefits of these choices and compare them to your other options.

On the flipside, there are those choices that take change by the horns, and actively create an abundance of joy leading to higher levels of satisfaction. Building positive goals, believing in your own ability, taking happiness into your own hands, and being a driving productive force

within your sphere of influence are all choices you can create. They are the choices that require investment of mental and/or physical effort. They are the choices that aren't always easy; where the payoff is delayed, and where risk is involved. They are the choices that leave you with new experiences, new lessons learned, personal growth, new skills and greater mastery over existing skills. They are the choices that leave you with values that last beyond the moment in which you made them. Once you've seen the happiness motivation behind your low-satisfaction choices, you can finally compare and contrast them to your higher satisfaction choices, thus more accurately surveying your field of cognitive and behavioral options.

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## CHAPTER 23

# Axiom-Based Self-Analysis

## The Happiness Axioms

*The more decisions that you are forced to make alone, the more you are aware of your freedom to choose.*

– Thornton Wilder, American playwright and novelist

The axiom “Happiness is the only cognitive motivator” can give you great insight into previously puzzling personal choices of thought and behavior. We discussed the potential for the creation of high value happiness in the chapter on positive experiences, and we discussed several potentially low value choices in the previous chapter. All of these choices are equally motivated by the pursuit of happiness but obviously they don’t all have equal results or consequences. Keeping the “happiness is the only cognitive motivator” axiom in mind, your first task is to identify the way in which you thought that your choices in each experience would bring some sort of happiness using the following format in your notebook or on your word processor:

To be clear, we are asking what value (thing of personal importance) you thought your choices would help you to acquire/create/fulfill etc. When you add this level of self-analysis to your notebook, you are identifying the more specific happiness motivation for your choices. When the choices relate to a positive experience such as “getting my college degree” and your choices were to study and to work hard in every class, it will be easy to identify your happiness motivation: “I thought that I could become financially independent, that I would gain a sense of accomplishment and that I would earn respect from the people I love by the hard work I put into my education.” Like we said, the positive experiences will be pretty simple.

Happiness Motivation:	Describe the intended happiness that your choices were meant to provide when you made them.
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This is a simple question and it will probably be easy to carry out for your positive experiences but may be a little tougher when approaching your choices in self-limiting and/or painful experiences. The more effort you put into the tough work of self-examination in this exercise, the more you will benefit. Remember that every choice you’ve ever made was an effort to pursue some sort of happiness, even if it didn’t work out so well in the end. It is absolutely vital to understand this fact of life.

However, you may need to face some ugly truths when looking for the happiness motivation behind those choices that end in painful consequences. You may have to come to terms with the fact that when you were placing blame or resenting, you were seeking nothing more than the value of being at the top of the heap. That is, much of the negativity we direct towards others is simply designed to make ourselves feel good by reinforcing the belief that others are “worse than me.” You may find that there

was some satisfaction in vengeful acts, even when these acts were followed with great guilt and discomfort. You may also find in some cases that the happiness value you sought was simply the avoidance of the responsibility to change, work, or grow. This especially applies in cases where we give ourselves negative labels and repeat self-destructive thoughts. Such habits absolve us of the responsibility to change and grow, and thus provide us with the immediate comfort of reduced effort.

Where you've chased the cheap thrills of life, the happiness value is simple; you sought a quick high of some kind, or mere sensation. Don't be afraid to admit this where it applies. Although you may not like the long-term consequences of many of your choices, you shouldn't confuse that with the fact that there was something about the initial choice that you found satisfying in some way, even if only for a moment. All behavior is purpose-driven, even those choices which are clearly shortsighted. By courageously owning this fact as you identify the

happiness motivation for all of your choices, you will learn some profound truths about yourself. You will come to know how to make more satisfying choices in the future because you now have an honest basis of comparison without the cloud of shame or guilt in the way.

In the next level of analysis you will visit two axioms together. First you will recall the axiom "there are no shortcuts to lasting happiness" and ask yourself whether your choices were aimed at low satisfaction happiness, and whether they were shortcuts that left you feeling empty later. If so, how did this work out? Next you will recall the axiom "your happiness is in your own hands" and examine whether your choices reflected a proactive creation of happiness values of any kind, or whether you expected the values to be created by others. Taken together these questions evaluate the level of happiness created by your choices. This evaluation of your choices will be added to the previous exercises you have completed. Use the format below.

Happiness Value	Did your choices create temporary fleeting values, or did they create lasting value? Describe in detail. Were your choices boldly proactive, or were they reactive, short sighted, and bogged down in expectations?
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Again, these new levels of self-analysis are to be added to your previous work. So for your painful life experiences, the full analysis with these new sections would look like this (the newly added sections are bolded below):

Situation:	Here you will restate the basic situation, as originally written. Give a bare bones description of the painful situation.
Behavioral Choices (Chosen Thoughts):	Here you'll describe the actions that you (and only you) took that contributed to the painful situation.
Cognitive Choices (Chosen Actions):	Here you'll describe the character of your internal thoughts during, immediately following the situation, and over time. You should also question whether you held any expectations of others which may have transferred your responsibility for happiness into their hands.
Results of Thoughts:	How have you behaved, and how have you felt as a result of your thoughts about the painful situation? Describe that in detail here. If your thoughts have resulted in negative self-labels, please mention that in this section as well.

Level of personal control, and range of options:	How much control did you have in the initial situation? Did you have a part, or were you more of a victim? What do you have control over now? What options are available to you now (both behaviorally and cognitively)? Are their flexible factors at play which may enable you to approach similar situations differently in the future?
Happiness Motivation:	Describe the result that your choices were meant to provide when you made them.
Happiness Value your choices:	Did your choices create temporary fleeting values – or did they of create lasting value? Describe in detail. Were your choices boldly proactive, or were they reactive, short sighted, and bogged down in expectations?

And your fully analyzed positive life experiences would look like this with the new sections added:

Experience:	Describe the experience here in one line, as you did in your original list.
Cognitive and Behavioral Choices:	What thoughts and actions did you choose that contributed to the creation of this positive experience?
Value Factor:	What values of yours were fulfilled by the experience?
Happiness Motivation:	Describe the result that your choices were meant to provide when you made them.
Happiness Value your choices:	Did your choices create temporary fleeting values, or did they of create lasting value? Describe in detail. Were your choices boldly proactive, or were they reactive, short sighted, and bogged down in expectations?

As with your previous self-analysis exercises, you will decide how much work you put into this. The more thorough you are in analyzing each of your memories from your original list, the more benefit you will receive from the exercise. By doing this, you are training your mind to think in terms of the axioms, and see them at work. Although this work is hard now, according to the principles of neuroplasticity, this intense effort will affect your brain and make this perspective a natural working part of you in time. You will become an efficient problem-solving machine.

Please revisit your previous work and add these new levels of analysis. (Again, this work is being completed in your notebook or on your word processor.) Then move on to the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER 24

# Axiom-Based Self-Analysis Happiness Value Exercises

Keep these axioms in mind as you complete the following assignments in your notebook or on word processor.

- Happiness is the greatest motivator in the human condition
- There are no shortcuts to lasting happiness

All choices that a person makes fall somewhere on a happiness value scale (even the painful choices we've discussed throughout previous chapters). If they didn't provide some sort of happiness, we simply wouldn't choose them. However, not all choices bring an equal level of satisfaction. Your task now is to define and describe, in your own words, the character of choices on both extremes of this scale.

*Please define and describe highly satisfying choices, in your own words:*

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*Please define and describe low satisfaction choices, in your own words:*

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## Happiness Value Analysis

Your answers above are the terms of your Happiness Value Scale. Now that you've defined the nature of low and high satisfaction choices, your next task is to analyze your life segments according to this scale. Leaf back through your original list of memories, as well as your analysis of changes you've faced, negative life events, and positive life experiences, one life segment at a time; and then write a short essay for each segment describing your low satisfaction choices during that time period, and also describe your high satisfaction choices during that time period.

Here's an example. Our guest, Joanne, looked at all of her previous self-analysis work and completed the following essay about one of her life segments:

## Happiness Value Analysis

### *College Years 18-22 years old*

#### High Satisfaction Choices:

During my college years I really buckled down and worked hard. There were many nights I wanted to go out and party, but I chose to hit the books instead. I felt like I was missing out on some of the fun, but it felt great when my grades came in. I kept my partying to the weekends and I'm thankful for it now. I actively sought out an internship each summer and it paid off after graduation with many connections and job offers. I chose to work hard for experience and it was highly satisfying in the end, even though it was tough along the way. These choices paid off in the long run, and I felt productive at the time too. I rate these choices as being in the 8-10 range on the happiness value scale.

I also made many decisions to be closer with my family at this time. Even though I was far away from home, I made the most of every visit. I felt like I appreciated my family more at this time in my life, and got more satisfaction out of what little time I had with them. I was kind of a pain to my parents in my teen years, but during these years I always helped out whenever I was home, and chose to have meaningful interactions with them too. I rate my family choices as a 10 on the happiness value scale.

#### Low Satisfaction Choices:

I was very afraid of being alone at this time of my life. I jumped into a very serious relationship with Frank. He was the first guy who took an interest in me at college. I was serious, but he was not the right guy for me. We fought a lot and I stayed with him because it was comfortable and low risk. In the long run though, it was a waste of time, and not that satisfying at all. There was a lot of pain along the way. As painful as it was though, it simplified things so I didn't have the distraction of dating. I would rate my choice to be involved in a relationship with Frank as a 4 on the happiness value scale.

I grew apart from my good friend Megan in college because I was always trying to give her advice about who to date, what dorm she should live in, what major she should pick; literally everything. It felt good to be authoritative, but this eventually drove a wedge between us. The final straw was when I said I wouldn't go to a party with her if she brought her boyfriend Brian along. This led to an explosive fight and we haven't talked much since. I really felt like I was helping her, and that felt good, but it wasn't satisfying in the long run. After the argument, I spent a lot of time resenting Megan and complaining about her to my mother – I thought about apologizing to her, but I also thought about how embarrassed I would be if I did that, so I didn't. I felt like I was in the right, and backed up by my mother's opinion at the time, and that had a certain satisfying quality at the time, but I'd rather have my friend now than be "right." My choices with Megan rank as a 1 on the happiness value scale.

#### Summary:

During my college years, I made a lot of forward-looking choices in the way of education and career. This brought me more lasting happiness in the way of increased self-esteem, and a sense of achievement. My lower satisfaction choices tended to revolve around personal relationships. I would like to be as organized about improving my social life as I was at pursuing my professional life. Overall, I think my choices during these years averaged towards the 6-8 range on the happiness value scale – I say this because I created a great future during this time, with 4 years worth of bold choices to be active and work hard - and it pays off to this day. There was a little lost time in a benign relationship, but it's not a disaster – but the loss of Megan as a friend was a tough price to pay.

The example above is just one essay about one life segment. Joanne made a list of 7 different life segments originally:

- 1. Childhood (earliest memory to 12 years old)**
- 2. Adolescence/Junior High and High School years (13-18 years old)**
- 3. College years (18-22)**
- 4. Living on my own (23-29)**
- 5. Early Marriage years (30-34)**
- 6. Early Parenting Years (35-54)**
- 7. After The Kids Moved Out (55- today)**

She wrote an essay about the happiness value of her choices for each of these time periods in her life. Your job now is to do the same. When discussing your choices, be sure to describe what happiness you got out of them, even those choices that seem negative.

By the time you finish this exercise, you'll be done with your self-analysis, and you'll have a good idea about the life choices you'd like to move toward from this point on. Also, by learning from the past in this very detailed fashion, you no longer have to wonder how your past affects you today; you can either move forward productively and with a focus on greater satisfaction levels for your happiness items or not. The choice is yours and always has been. But now you have no excuses or justifiable reasons to remain ignorant on the truth of who you are and the choices you have made. Now take the time to complete your essays so you can unshackle yourself from the past!

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## CHAPTER 25

## Blame vs. Responsibility

*“There are no such things as limits to growth, because there are no limits to the human capacity for intelligence, imagination, and wonder.”*

– President Ronald Reagan

Now that you’ve completed your self-analysis, whether you realize it or not, you have jumpstarted massive change in your life. The self-analysis exercises were all designed to help you recognize the immense control you have in your life and have always had. By analyzing each life event from this perspective – looking at your choices (and their effects) rather than the choices of others – you have literally begun the process of rewiring your brain to make this your new default point of view. You have practiced seeing yourself as effective and in control. And what a powerful point of view it is! Research shows that those who see life this way (internal locus of control) work harder to get what they want and eventually achieve much more than those who feel hopeless and stay focused on things that they can’t control (the external locus of control point of view). An internal locus of control

perspective literally boosts personal motivation and thus personal achievement and results, while an external locus of control snuffs out motivation. So the question is... how and why does it work this way?

Earlier in the text we discussed the difference between blame and responsibility, and it pays to understand this difference. Blame is a dead end. To blame is to say “you’re bad and at fault.” Blame is used to dissolve relationships, both personal and professional, to put an end to an activity and to decide who to punish. To become responsible is much different, much more specific and far more constructive than to assign blame. When you become responsible, you are looking at what can be changed to get a better outcome. Let’s look at both perspectives:

External Locus of Control Perspective <i>Blame Statements</i>	Internal Locus of Control Perspective <i>Responsibility Statements</i>
I keep getting high because I have the disease of addiction.	I have continued to use because I’ve believed that drugs will provide the happiness I want.
I keep going back to drugs because I can’t handle the stress and anxiety of life.	I like getting high. Sometimes I use stress and anxiety as a reason to justify my choice to say “screw it” and get high. But I am not weak – I have freely made these choices in my pursuit of happiness.

I failed my class because the teacher didn't like me (or because "I'm stupid").	I failed my class because I didn't study hard enough (or ask for help or took a class that was too far above my current abilities and knowledge).
I can't get a date because no one likes me.	I haven't gotten a date because I haven't asked the right person yet.
I can't get a date because I'm ugly.	I haven't gotten a date because I haven't presented myself well.
I can't get a better job because I'm afraid of failure.	I've chosen to stay at my current job because I've chosen safety over the risk and increased effort it would take to find another job.
I make bad decisions because I'm a bad person.	I've made some choices that haven't worked out well because I've been focused on immediate gratification rather than long term results.

We hope these examples give you a good idea of the difference between blame and responsibility. That last example points at one of the most important differences between these two perspectives. To simply label yourself as bad is not the same as taking responsibility for yourself. The problem is that when you simply label yourself as bad or defective in some way, you're seeing the problem as unchangeable. To take responsibility is to identify what you can change – as the “responsibility statement” version of that example so clearly demonstrates. In that version, you can *change* your focus and make new decisions.

This is perhaps one of the most important applications of the axiom “you are what you think.” If you want to think of your life as being determined by your genetic endowments, authority figures, culture, or any other circumstances over which you have no control, then you shall become powerless to change. But if you want to change your life, start by thinking about what is within your power to change.

You are what you think goes well beyond the mere meaning of the words. When you practice this responsibility perspective (as you already have been in your self-analysis), the principles of self-directed neuroplasticity work to make this your new norm, and it eventually becomes nearly effortless to see life in this way. As a result, motivation builds, and you direct your effort toward thoughts and activities that will pay off.

One of our favorite analogies for this process of self-directed neuroplastic change is to look at the brain like a bundle of trillions of muscle cells. For example, when you go to the gym and spend a lot of time exercising your biceps, lifting gradually heavier weights on a regular basis, your bicep muscles actually begin to grow. Amounts of weight which were once very hard to lift eventually become very easy to lift, and physical labor is no longer so much of a struggle. But should you stop lifting long enough and focus only on your abdominal muscles for a long time, your biceps will shrink and it will become harder to use them to lift great amounts of weight again. The brain is the same, in principle. Think of your neurons and their various connections as the muscles that support thought and other cognitive processes, and the analogy becomes clear. If you practice thinking in terms of blame, then it becomes a nearly effortless state to maintain with the big blame muscles you've grown. Likewise, having paid no attention to your responsibility muscles, they are very hard to use. It takes an intense focus and an uncomfortable amount of effort to build up the muscles that support an empowered responsibility point of view – but this is exactly what you've done with your work on the self-analysis process.

With that said, there are issues which some people get bogged down in and keep them from fully living and embracing the internal responsibility-based point of view. These issues are fear and shame. We will give you

the intellectual ammunition to deal with these boogie monsters of fear and shame over the next two chapters. Both of these issues come down to a matter of attitude, and you can choose your way around them once you recognize their true nature and value.

Do you want substantial change in your life? Change is constant, so you will get it one way or the other. You will become more ingrained in your low satisfaction habits, feel more powerless and experience greater levels of unhappiness from your increasingly short-sighted choices – or you’ll reverse course, become more empowered, open new options for yourself and experience greater levels of overall life satisfaction. The choice is yours. Are you satisfied with the results of your current path? Is the perceived safety of your current routines satisfying enough? Are you willing to risk putting out some effort to be courageous, try new ideas, and make new choices in order to find greater levels of happiness? Are you worth more happiness than you’ve been allowing yourself?

## The Freedom Model’s Role in Destroying Fear and Shame

The Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation states that human behavior has reasons rather than causes, and that all people freely choose their behavior because they think it will bring them happiness in some way. Not only is this law of motivation a great way of explaining the behavior of others, it’s also a great way to reframe your own behavior in your own mind so that you can make new choices. This law, when kept in mind, actually facilitates personal change.

### Fear

Typically, troubled people (and their helpers) will identify a list of fears with which they are saddled. Fear of failure, fear of success, fear of intimacy, and fear of change are common examples. Clear thinking on the subject is needed here, and so-called fears must be looked at for what they are. If a person claims to have a fear of failure that they blame for their personal stagnancy, such as staying in a low-satisfaction intimate relationship, what’s really going on is that they prefer to stick with a thing that is easy and contains no new or unknown risks. They stay fixed in their present relationship because they prefer it more than having to expend the effort searching the unknown to attain greater happiness. So, they live in their belief that they will be happier with the choice to stay in the current relationship than they believe they would be pursuing a new relationship.

Thus, the so-called fear is actually a personal evaluation of what will make them happiest, and what lengths they

are willing to go to gain more happiness in life. And guess what? It is okay to accept the downsides of a given life choice in favor of the comfort provided by the familiar. It’s also okay to decide that you want to re-evaluate how much risk you’re willing to take and effort you’re willing to expend in order to make and follow a new choice. But as long as you view your choices as being ruled by fears that you “have” (that is you’re pathologically stuck with), it’ll be tough to reach either of these conclusions. You can’t make the new choice because you fear the unknown, and you can’t be happy with the old choice because you fear the endlessness of it. With the Freedom Model®, you recognize the truth for what it is; that you are in control of all your choices. Discard your fears and simply be responsible for your choices. By framing every choice according to the Freedom Model® (e.g. “I’m making this choice because I get some level of happiness from it,”) you empower yourself to change and find even more comfort in ownership of your choices.

If you’re comfortable with a certain position in life, such as being in a relationship that doesn’t fit other people’s norms or isn’t even necessarily ideal according to your own ideals, that’s your business and you can still own it with integrity. You get to choose where you want to focus your efforts in life, because it’s your life, and you choose what to accept or not accept.

### Shame

That brings us to our next topic: shame. People live with all sorts of shameful thoughts that come in the form of “shoulds.” “I should be married to a doctor rather than a plumber.” “I should never make mistakes.” “I should be thinner.” “I should make more money.” “I should read more.” According to whom? As soon as you abandon your own standards of what will make you happiest and try to replace them with other people’s standards of happiness (often in the form of thoughts featuring the term “should”) you cloud your decision-making process with shame. The Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation says that all human beings act to attain personal happiness, so the only thing you *should* do is that which makes you happiest. You only have so much time in your life – wouldn’t you rather spend it pursuing the dreams and choices you want to fully invest in, rather than beating yourself up about the past or all the ways you don’t live up to other people’s ideals?

To truly embrace and build upon the responsibility perspective includes reframing so-called “fears” as choices built upon happiness evaluations, and accurately recognizing where you have the control to change those choices if you want; free of shame and full of ownership. We will expand on these two topics in the following two chapters.

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## CHAPTER 26

# Happier Options The Key to a Successful Perspective

*“Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently.”*

– Henry Ford

The threat of dying or losing one’s family as a result of using substances does little to stop some people from drinking or drugging heavily. How is it that the fear of horrific consequences of substance use does not stop people from using? Why is fear such an inadequate motivator to change behavior?

The answer is simple. The accepted negative consequences of these behaviors are simply viewed as the price paid for the benefits they provide. In other words, the benefits outweigh the costs. In some cases the individual simply focuses on the benefits and ignores the possible negative consequences. This follows the Freedom Model® logic that we are always moving toward happiness – even those choices that initially bring happiness but end in pain over the long haul.

With that said, we hear people say things like,

“I am motivated by fear every day, not happiness! I sit scared and anxious, frozen by my anxieties! You think I stay stuck because this makes me happy?!”

These statements and statements like them imply that fear is a just as powerful motivator as happiness and that happiness is not the *only* cognitive motivator in the human condition as the Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation states. At first glance their argument seems valid. However, we need to consider exactly what fear is.

Fear has two distinct faces. There is primal fear and chosen fear, and they are very different. Let us use an

analogy to describe both classes of fear and how they work in the human condition.

### Primal Fear

Let’s start with primal fear and how to overcome this natural human reaction.

Imagine a person who suddenly realizes he is about to be pursued by a very angry, hungry lion. Naturally, the moment he first sees the lion advancing towards him he is gripped by fear. This type of fear, primal fear, is truly a hard-wired reaction that is immediate, strong, and temporarily overwhelming to the mind and bodily systems. Primal fear is short in its duration and is initially an uncontrolled response to extreme external stimuli. It is caused by an event or situation that frightens us. Let’s break down this class of fear in a step-by-step manner.

The emotion of primal fear is experienced as the individual first sees the lion begin his terrifying approach. Once the mind processes what is occurring, through the senses of sight and hearing, it creates an immediate thought back into consciousness, “Oh my God, a lion is after me!” Immediately upon the consciousness (the mind) experiencing this thought, the brain is then sent a returned emergency message – “Get ready to fight or run!” Next, the brain, having received this message, sends

electrical and chemical signals to the body by dumping adrenaline into the bloodstream to prepare the fight or the flight from the advancing cat. This is the embodiment of primal fear; an initially uncontrollable fight or flight response based on outside stimuli.

What happens next though is how this primal fear response is put under control. The natural reactive fight or flight emotion of primal fear (“Oh my God, a lion is after me!”) is quickly replaced by the motive for greater happiness (i.e. “I need to go climb a tree to get away”). Remember that happiness is relative to the moment and conditions in which it is experienced. Happiness in this case is simply making the moves necessary to survive the pending attack by climbing a tree rather than choosing to remain frozen in a fight and/or flight reaction. Once logic is created by the mind, (and the option for this conversion is created by the mind) primal fear dissolves and is replaced by logic. The cost versus benefit analysis that logic now provides, naturally takes over. Our logical mind analyzes the situation and runs through the costs versus benefits options available:

If I am attacked I will not be happy. If I can avoid being attacked, I will be happier. Therefore, should I run? Should I pick up a stick or rock? Should I play dead, etc., etc.

In a situation so extreme, happiness can be seen as the simple process of logic replacing the initial primal fear responses so you have a greater chance at saving your skin.

So, in essence, the mind takes over control of the situation and its logic quickly replaces raw primal fear that just mere seconds ago was launched uncontrollably. Again, this conversion usually happens in less than a second or two. When the logical cost vs. benefit analysis of the mind replaces primal fear responses there is no longer room for uncontrolled fear. Because the brain is a single cognitive processor and cannot think two thoughts at once, the logic that has taken the place of the initial primal fearful response is now in control – hence the fear response is overwritten; it is gone. Again, this is where uncontrolled fear is replaced by a series of relative happiness choices – Do I run? Do I pick up a rock and fight? Do I yell and wave my arms in defense of my position? Do I climb a tree? Or, do I sit still and freeze hoping this all goes away?

## Chosen Fear

The last option mentioned above (do I sit still and freeze hoping this all goes away?) sounds a lot like the person is being motivated by fear and not happiness, doesn't

it. It sounds a lot like the person at the beginning of the chapter who said they are motivated by fear, not happiness. But look closely.

In actuality, deciding to remain fearful is a choice. In stark contrast, what defines true primal fear is the initial fight or flight hardwired temporary response that is not choice based – it is an initial reaction that just happens as a result of something we find very scary. When an individual decides to then choose to remain in a state of primal fear, they are choosing that state because they believe it is the best option at that moment (again, a form of relative happiness). That's right, choosing fear can be a person's version of relative happiness for that particular moment and those particular circumstances. They believe it is better to sit and ignore the lion than to fight, run, jump, hop or scream. They have chosen fear over other actions they could take. Again, chosen fear is a form of relative happiness. They have weighed the costs of running, fighting, etc. and decided to sit and wait out the consequences. That is relative happiness, because to this individual the other initial options looked even more risky by comparison. Costs vs. benefits – that is the Freedom Model® in a nutshell.

Many people choose to remain in a state of chosen fear and to concentrate on this emotion as a means to cope with life's more difficult challenges. This low level form of relative happiness (chosen fear) is selected to avoid the responsibility and effort needed to change and/or adapt to certain aspects of life, usually those aspects that need the most attention and those that tend to emotionally overwhelm. Unfortunately, life is not too kind to those who choose fear over proactive action and the consequences can be horrific (as in the case of the impending lion attack). The nature of chosen fear is to sit idle in the presence of the problem. Problems generally grow bigger if unaddressed, and the lion will eventually get hungry enough to eat you.

We began the chapter with an individual who claimed that they were not happy with their fearful, anxious, stifled life. While they described being a victim of their fears, they also, without even realizing it, described their utter devotion to their fears! This individual may not like the consequences of their commitment to choosing fear, but at a minimum they might want to stop fooling themselves and others and admit that they are choosing fear and choosing to reinforce fear. Listen to their words again:

“I am motivated by fear every day, not happiness! I sit scared and anxious, frozen by my anxieties! You think I stay stuck because this makes me happy?”

The answer is yes. Absolutely! Maybe not the joyful laughter one thinks of when describing happiness, but

a relative form of insulating dull comfort that only deep, chosen, dedicated fear can provide. Although we do not know what it is that this individual is afraid of, we know one thing for sure. At the moment they said those words, choosing fear trumped facing the object of it. The instant this individual decides to look at the simple possibility that letting go of their fear might provide greater returns than living in the cold, isolating shadow of it, will be the moment that their fear will begin to dissipate.

Let's look at another example of chosen fear (relative happiness). Maybe the individual just had a bitter, painful divorce and has remained celibate because they choose to be fearful of the vulnerability

that is a natural part of any intimate relationship. Let's now look at this situation through the lens of the Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation. The individual is more comfortable without the pain that a relationship might produce. Deciding to place importance on what is more comfortable to this person is therefore a "happier" option than the risk of being hurt (the "less happy" option). Again, this is a costs versus benefits judgment. This Freedom Model® perspective presents the individual as someone deciding what is best for their circumstances and the safest route forward in their life by means of comparing it to what they know and what their past experience tells them.

But with all this said, no one is at the complete mercy of their pasts or past experiences unless they choose to be! At any point they can expand their options to include the possibility of a new relationship if they make the decision that the risks are now worth it. Again, costs versus benefits.

What drives the human race is not the fear of consequences but rather, the pursuit of happiness. There are two ways to say something. Which is more accurate?

"I am afraid to jump off the cliff and into the water." Or...

"I want to feel safe, so I will avoid taking the plunge."

While they are saying the same thing, the truth is that this individual is motivated by their desire for self-preservation and therefore relative happiness. This perspective shift will have huge implications for you if you can make it. See your fears through the lens of the Freedom Model®. Ask yourself what happiness value each of your fears actually provides you. Do you have health issues you are fearful of? Maybe you decide to fear them to avoid

the work necessary to fix them. Are you frozen by your fears of financial insecurity? Maybe you have decided to remain in this state so you do not have to be responsible for the work necessary to pull yourself out of the financial situation you find yourself in.

Once you look at each fearful item as things and habits you have chosen, you will discover that your fears become more accurately defined and much more easily changed.

When you identify which form of fear you have at any given moment, it will become quite apparent that over 99% of your fears are of the chosen variety, not the primal, temporarily uncontrolled variety.

*Happiness is relative to the moment and conditions in which it is experienced.*

## Choosing Fear or Choosing Less Fear – The Path to Progress

When people decide to quit doing drugs, (or make any behavioral change) their initial reaction after an especially expensive or morally degrading bout with drugs might be to avoid getting high in the future. They might think to themselves, "I never want to feel like this again; it is so horrible and embarrassing!" This may be followed by a desire to change to a more positive lifestyle. They may react with fear initially ("I am afraid to get high again") and then they may solve the problem by moving to a more proactive mental and emotional state ("I think I'd be happier without drugs, so I will not get high again"). The initial, temporary fearful reaction gives way to solutions based on pursuing a more positive future; that is, to pursue a happier set of lifestyle options, the first of which is to rally their power and choose to abstain or moderate. Of the two different perspectives (choosing fear or choosing to be less fearful through solution based thinking), the second provides a more effective long-term solution. Remember, to assume that the lion will not attack, and to remain fixed in front of the beast is to pick an option that is fraught with painful consequences. While the individual making the choice has decided to ignore the lion and remain motionless, many other more productive options might have been picked. They could run to the nearest tree and find a branch too small for the 350lb lion to get to them. In the same way, the choice to confidently change a habit by being committed to abstinence for instance, is a much more liberating, productive and satisfying option than seeing it as depriving oneself of drugs and alcohol. This is the constant cost vs. benefit

analysis we make in our lives every day. How we view our future options matters! We can either view change as sacrificing a known means of limited happiness, or we can view change as a path to become happier. One view sees change as a loss, the other a path to gain.

Consider “I am going to be abstinent and rebuild my life” vs. “I can’t get high anymore.” Which is more motivating? Which option provides a greater feeling of satisfaction and happiness? When you state your life changes out loud in this more positive manner, you tap into a greater well of lasting motivation because it follows the Law of Universal Motivation more closely. One manner of thinking is an immediate band-aid, while the other is a path to long term survival and then greater prosperity and sustainable fulfillment that naturally follows.

After an especially painful bender the first initial reaction to any future use of booze and drugs may be fear and even hysterics. (“I never want to live like this again!”) If this fearful reaction is not soon replaced by a more proactive solution, then the individual is choosing to remain in a state of self-limiting fear. Remember, chosen fear is a form of happiness, but a very limited one, at best. Staying put through chosen fear increases the chances of poor consequences as time moves forward. That is how chosen fear options work when they are not replaced with more rational decision-making. There is little room for progress to better the situation at hand. As a matter of simple fact, if people retain their fears and concentrate on them, they become that which they think about; in this case, more fearful. How many times have you thought to yourself, “I cannot live like this anymore,” while staring at the wreckage of what used to be your life, only to be drinking/drugging again in short order? Why does this happen? Because you become what you concentrate on!

Whenever someone begins the process of personal change and is confronted with a difficult set of circumstances, they are able to take an infinite number of paths to find greater happiness. In some cases, however, they stifle this growing process in one of two common ways:

### 1. Dwelling on Fears.

In this scenario individuals keep choosing and then dwelling on the fear of using again, rather than exploring new options. They then become what they think about most, in this case more fearful. The brain, being a single processor of thoughts, is never provided a chance to express other

more productive options, as it is so busy tracking and cultivating greater fearful thoughts of what might happen in the future. The next step in this internal self-limiting progression is that the individuals return to substance use because that is the familiar path back to some sliver of happiness remembered from the recent past.

### 2. Missing the Window of Opportunity

People in this scenario are also initially fearful and they stop using substances because they are genuinely afraid of the harsh consequences of getting drunk and/or high again. The fear of the consequences does temporarily stop all use. Unlike the choice reviewed above, these people decide not to feed their initial fears with more fearful thoughts of what could happen if they get drunk or high. Rather, they allow themselves to let go of their

hysterical primal fear of drinking and drugging and this allows for more clear thinking. This builds a window of opportunity to new options and self-expansive new choices.

During this brief window of opportunity, if old habits are not consciously replaced when the fears of negative consequences begin to fade, people simply return to their previous habits. (These are their known avenues to happiness.) The unfortunate choice not to move forward with other new goals keeps the old options of substance use viable because boredom will give way to old habits. It is guaranteed that you will find something to replace your boredom, even if it’s an old habit that ultimately brings pain.

Those individuals who choose never to expand their belief that other options may offer better results than what they received from substance use in the past are doomed to repeat the past. They are not taking advantage of that very crucial time slot that falls between being scared of using again after a bad bout with alcohol and/or drugs and not being fearful of it. That “window of opportunity” is missed. That window of opportunity, or break in the using cycle, is the time to look outward and ask yourself, “Is it possible that I could do something else that may provide a greater return?” Once you answer that question then it is time to get on with the new goal and broaden your horizons. That window of opportunity will close in the presence of boredom; don’t let that moment to grow slip away!

Remember constantly, that any self-limiting situation you find yourself in (we use the substance use example here because it is such a good one) only has the power to hurt you if you allow it to remain a situation to be feared.

“

*Chosen fear is a form of happiness, but a very limited one.*

”

Also, you do not have to pay the steep consequences that a self-limiting lifestyle demands. But that decision requires changes in attitude, a strong willingness to look at everything you choose through the lens of **“Can I be happier if I do so and so...?”** You are powerful, choice-based being!

Remember, that a primal fear response is only a temporary moment in time that quickly gives way to chosen fear, if we let it. What’s more, chosen fear is an indirect path to low levels of happiness – there is some tiny bit of happiness in avoidance of pain and negative consequences, but it’s so low that it offers little incentive to keep it going and its motivating power dissipates. A direct and open pursuit of happier options is a much more powerful motivator, and you always have the ability to seek greater levels of happiness directly, no matter the situation. Humans are always in the pursuit of happiness. So, if your moments of fear and pain are not replaced by a positive motivation to move past those old options for happiness, your mind will automatically return to direct pursuit of happiness by some variation of past practices.

Simply put, chosen fear is a weak happiness value and thus is a weak version of happiness. Don’t you think you are worth more than such small streams of satisfaction? Are you open to the pursuit of happiness that can be permanent should you practice the skill of converting your fears to faith in your future and then gain faith in yourself. When this conversion of perspective is complete and you know you are naturally powerful and can accomplish any goal you set for yourself, then you will begin to really live!

## Identical Goals – Different Foundations

You may have resolved to change your life in the past but reversed course and went right back to old habits. So, what would make your current choice any different? Thus far, we’ve discussed two factors that complicate the choice to change and presented you with new ways of thinking for each:

1. Previous chapters have explained that the old belief in self-limits destroys any chance at new lifestyle options. You now have the alternative not to believe in limiting your life. You can embrace your personal power over your behavior and choices.
2. You may have learned to focus only on choosing to fear the consequences of your choices and behaviors. Thus, your period of change was based on choosing to deprive yourself of a pleasure because of the risks

involved. It’s not surprising that the motivating power of chosen deprivation wore out and that you returned to old self-limited behaviors. This time, you’re aware of the option to focus on positive motivations, such as deciding to reach for greater happiness rather than choosing to deprive yourself.

You can now approach your decision to change from a totally different and very effective perspective. No matter what state your life is in now, know that you’re in full control and that you can make the choice to pursue maximum life satisfaction, rather than choosing to deprive yourself.

## Option Expansion – The Key to Greater Happiness

Many choices people make may look insane to the outside observer (e.g. the crack user who gives up her children to continue to get high, the drinker who drinks his fortunes and family away) are in fact the best option that person sees at that particular moment. So your job in this program is to search out, discover, and attain new life options that will build a joyous, long lasting, deep sense of happiness and fulfillment for you rather than reinforcing a life based on short-term gratification with a high level of negative consequences.

Life is always changing. Therefore you now have two main objectives in creating a more stable environment in these naturally tumultuous seas:

1. Adapting positively to the challenges that life thrusts upon you, (e.g. a spouse leaving, a job loss, a natural disaster, etc.)
2. Creating a set of goals for a more fulfilling, resilient life (e.g. by reducing or ceasing your substance use, changing or ending abusive relationships, securing or creating a more fulfilling career, etc.) That is, direct the change in your life instead of just waiting for it to happen the way you want.

Now let us move on and address another key to driving your success forward, how to deal with guilt and shame productively.

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## CHAPTER 27

# Guilt and the Destructive Veil of Shame

*“How blunt are all the arrows of thy quiver in comparison with those of guilt.”*

— Robert Blair, Scottish Poet

Now that you have written about your life and both your past and current behaviors, it would be easy to wallow in self-pity and shame because writing about the unsatisfactory aspects of life can easily lead to this. Although indulging in self-pity and shame may seem attractive at the moment, and based on past patterns might be easy to fall into, the mission of this chapter is to help you move forward without shame. In order to accomplish this, it is important to understand where guilt and shame come from, why some forms of guilt can facilitate a productive outcome, and how the feelings of guilt can transform into shame with emotionally painful and self-limiting consequences.

By learning how to control and proactively limit guilty emotional responses, you can build a life filled with much greater satisfaction and fulfillment. As we cover this topic, we will explore the difference between guilt and shame. Both guilt and shame are negative feelings based on the self-judgment that you have either done something that you feel is wrong and bad or that you have failed to live up to standards of what you feel is good and right. However, there is an important difference between guilt and shame. Guilt takes the cognitive form of “I have done something bad,” whereas a shameful feeling takes the form of “I have done something bad, and I am bad.”

Contrary to what you may have been told, guilt does not always result in negative outcomes. It, unlike shame, can actually produce positive outcomes if used in a mature and effective manner. In fact, it often leads to personal

growth. However, shame blocks positive progress by its very nature and always results in greater levels of emotional pain. Let us begin this conversation with guilt.

## Guilt Can Actually Be Productive

Guilt is produced when an individual does something that they, personally, judge to be wrong, or believe that others judge to be wrong, and the guilty party feels bad about it.

In many cases of guilt, you might correct the offending behavior that caused it and simply move on. Some guilt episodes are quickly forgotten or ignored, only to rear their ugly head later on, and then the behavior may be fixed. Sometimes we choose to repeat behaviors that cause guilt before a decision is made to remedy and change the offending behaviors.

Guilt is by definition a natural emotional feeling that tells you to stop an offensive choice or behavior. When you listen to your emotions with clarity and maturity, you can decide to stop the choices or behaviors that cause guilty feelings. This is the productive use of guilt; it can motivate positive change in your life. You can, of course, choose to avoid remedying the situation and leave it to fester. This decision to avoid responsibility for your choices and behaviors can transform the original emotion of guilt into a deeper more painful form of long-term shame.

Consequently, the veil of deep shame is created in these particular situations causing untold grief.

It is obvious that productive episodes of guilt can exist, but this comes with a very important caveat. Guilt can only be a productive motivator when we are willing to correct the behaviors that cause it. Guilt is an emotion that can help us steer away from hurtful scenarios. To be specific, productive guilt is any guilt that motivates us to make positive change in ourselves and the world around us. It is really quite simple.

Productive guilt can be based on either minor mistakes with few consequences or on serious mistakes with major potential consequences. Things from stealing supplies at work to having an affair can be stopped and rectified through a process of true amends.

Your axiom-based self analysis will bring back memories of many negative events, some of which were obviously your fault. Learning to deal with guilt productively is a growing process. Those who have an immature outlook use guilt for furthering self-pity and as an excuse to fail. This often results in negative self-labeling – “I’m bad;” “I’m selfish;” “I’m stupid.” The moment you make the choice to grasp onto a misdeed and turn it into a negative self-label you are jumpstarting the shame process. Such labels sever your ability to make new choices. People who immerse themselves in self-pity and negative labels over their past misdeeds find it easy to regress. It goes something like this: “Damn, I feel so bad about that! Screw it; I’m going to go get high.” This is a very convenient way to remain tied to instant gratification and avoid the real issue of changing the behaviors that created the guilt.

Most therapy, especially therapy conducted by addiction professionals, suggests that if you feel guilt you will inevitably drink and drug; this is the cultural connection that we identified a few chapters back. This is nonsense, unless of course, you want to make it become true. Guilt is normal and, depending on what you do with it, can be a catalyst for productive change, or if left to fester, it can lead a person to become consumed by self-pity and shame. That choice is solely up to you, but neither choice demands use of substances!

Emotions, being the nerve endings of the mind, often give us important signals to change. It’s important to know this, so that you can respond constructively to these signals. If you stepped on a nail, your immediate response would be to pull it out of your foot. In doing so, you’ve responded to the pain constructively. Likewise, guilt is often saying, “stop doing this thing!” The choice to respond to guilt by drinking or drugging makes no sense. Such a response would be like stepping on that nail but instead of pulling it out of your foot; you get a back massage in order to feel better.

So here you are, guilty about a wretched past and, so far, no way to escape the guilt. You cannot just fess up to those you hurt and go on your merry way because this would be hurtful and unfair. On the other hand, you cannot let it irritate and drag you down emotionally. Between these two options there seems to be no solution, although there actually is.

We mentioned that the first phase of taking responsibility for our past indiscretions and getting over guilt is to commit never to repeat the behaviors. If you are unable to commit absolutely to not repeating the offending behavior, then you have made the decision not to change it. You have identified the offending behavior and decided that it is acceptable to you and that, if the same set of circumstances were present today, you would handle it exactly the same way. This means you are also prepared to accept the same outcome and the resulting consequences. As with everything, this is up to you.

However, if you decide to deal with guilt productively by no longer repeating the behaviors that caused it, it is time to make yourself available and be willing, if need be, to humbly apologize on the other party’s terms. This is not to be confused with the practice of simply making a list of people to whom you’ll deliver empty apologies. That process often accomplishes nothing more than exonerating ourselves at the expense of the person or persons we hurt.

## True Amends

The guilt you may be feeling now will lessen as you move on with a life that does not include the behaviors that originally created it. Humble, trustful actions speak much louder than saying, “I’m sorry” for situations that seriously hurt others. The people you hurt will see your changed attitudes and behaviors and will be much more satisfied with these new actions than they would be with a quick “I’m sorry.” You are no longer lying, cheating, being difficult, hurtful, and impatient, and as a result of these dramatic changes, a natural trust in the new you will grow. But this will take time and effort. Once that trust is built, the results of your patience and humility follow. Past incidents in which you may have hurt people will come up from time to time in the natural course of conversation. As the people around you see how you’ve changed, they will gain confidence in your new persona; they will feel more comfortable mentioning past problems and situations when they were hurt by you. At that point you will have the opportunity to finally say you’re truly sorry and ask how you can make things right. That is how true amends are done!

By making humble, true amends based on your actions and not empty promises, you will be standing on firm emotional ground and your commitment to rectifying past behaviors will be sincere. The key is to allow the other party to bring up the subject of your past hurtful behaviors. They may want to know the details as to why you did what you did and may want an apology. At this point you will be able to provide it. Remember, this reconciliation talk may take weeks, months or even years to occur and you must be willing to take the actions necessary to allow this to take place on their terms.

In summary, change your behaviors, be committed to those positive changes, and wait for the opportunity to make things right. It really is that simple. Not only is your contrition honest and meaningful to the hurt party, but you are arriving at this point without selfish motives. Remember that the guilt of today will eventually fade away on its own with time, assuming you make a firm commitment to adhere to your new lifestyle.

## Shame Veiling

“Shame veiling” is when people allow the emotion of guilt to grow into a curtain of shame that makes fixing the offending behavior almost impossible. The concentration on shameful acts blocks (veils) people from seeing new, more positive options and/or behaviors. Sometimes people choose to wallow in guilt and beat themselves up over their guilty actions. They may do this repeatedly. When this is your reaction to guilt, it spreads like a virus throughout your mind, infecting your entire self-image. The once simple matter of dealing with the original behavior, which could have been either owned or rectified, is lost in the fog of shame’s veil. Unfortunately, focusing on guilt in this way, rather than modifying or stopping the offensive behavior or choice, transforms it into shame that veils the situation with deeper negative feelings and hopelessness. By not seeking to change and labeling yourself as fundamentally “bad,” you create and reinforce a self-image of someone who is incapable of change. This then limits your ability to evaluate the situation that caused the guilt to begin with, thus limiting your ability to find happier choices.

All people engage in some behaviors or make choices that they know will not be acceptable to those around them. Because they feel judged both by themselves and others for those choices and behaviors, they become embarrassed, and then turn that judgment and embarrassment inward. The moment a person internalizes these negative judgments about her choices in life, she converts the judgment to personal shame.

This is because most people have a tendency to take on the opinions of others which is, in and of itself, a choice. People often place the judgment of others above their own and condemn themselves as bad. Once this shame is established it can be very difficult to change the behavior because of concentrating on the shame rather than making a change.

Remember that guilt is a negative feeling based on the judgment that what you’ve done (or are currently doing) is something that you feel is wrong or bad. Shame is the same, but with the added component of believing that you did something bad because you are, on the whole, a bad person and thus incapable of making better choices. Shame veiling is the act of turning average guilt about your role in a particular situation or choice into an object of massive self-pity and/or an all-encompassing negative belief about yourself. To shame veil is to choose a label and/or inactivity over active ownership of your choices thereby rendering you blind to new options that could eliminate the source of your guilt. It is a maladaptive reaction to everyday guilt.

The brain is a single processor. Therefore, you cannot be focused on both feeling shameful and changing the behavior that caused the original guilt at the same time. Depending on how ingrained shame scripts are from the past, you might find it incredibly hard to let go of this self-destructive shame. This is why we call it a veil of shame; the shame of your past actions literally blocks forward progress by clouding currently perceived shameful behaviors.

But what if you have a behavior that is completely antisocial and judged by those around you as “wrong” or “bad,” but you still want to behave in this manner? Maybe you do not want to change the behavior, but you feel guilty nonetheless because you have been taught to feel that way. The Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation makes sense of this. It states that there are no behaviors that an individual makes, including antisocial and destructive behaviors that are not under the full control and desire of the individual making them. Individuals always move in the direction of what makes them happy at any given moment in time, always; even choices that to others may seem mean, insane, or self-destructive. This being true, is there any behavior or choice you make that is not thought through on some cognitive level for the motive of attaining a level of personal satisfaction? The answer is no. All choices are made with the motive of attaining some level of happiness, even those choices that bring on feelings of guilt.

There are three basic options to deal with shame:

1. Let go of shame and change the behavior;
2. Let go of shame and keep the behavior. This means letting those around you know what to expect, regardless of whether they agree or not. You must also be willing to pay the consequences for these choices; or
3. Keep the shame and try to hide your behaviors in a cloud of self-pitying excuses as you may have up to this point.

Some examples of typical behaviors people might feel guilty about are heavy drinking and drug using, relationships that have toxic outcomes, dishonest and selfish behaviors, and sexual infidelity. The list goes on and on. The one quality these judged choices all have in common is that everyone knows they are not accepted by those around them. Yet, they must be acceptable to those who engage in those behaviors on some level because they chose them.

Perhaps you are now ready for a change in your life. Maybe you overeat and are ashamed of your weight. Maybe you drink too much, feel guilty about it, and try to hide the extent of your consumption. Maybe you mistreat your children when no one is there to witness your behavior, and you hate yourself for it. Maybe you cheat and lie to get your way and feel tremendous remorse and guilt. What all of these choices and behaviors have in common is the personal shame they bring about, and the potential for you to stop or change the behavior.

As we said earlier, when you experience shame about a certain behavior, the shameful behavior becomes harder to change because the shame itself gets in the way. People struggle to see how to change the offending behavior because their perception is clouded, or veiled, by the emotions of shame and self-pity. The shame and self-pity then becomes the focus, and these people never fix the behavior. To make matters worse, these people often repeat the behavior that caused the original guilt. The shame served no constructive purpose, and instead led to more guilt-laden choices. It can become an ever-downward spiral into abject misery.

Keep in mind that every family structure and every society has certain behavioral norms. In our society, for example, people are not supposed to enjoy overeating, drugging, or satisfying “selfish” wants at the expense of their children, friends’ or spouse’s needs. Yet, most people have their shameful, secret behaviors that bring them happiness. But many pull the ball and chain of that shame which then ends up reducing their happiness.

There are, of course, an infinite number of recipes for greater happiness that have less of a downside and negative consequence, but the shame of current choices keeps people tethered to them. Once caught in this mire, the shame becomes so paramount and in the forefront of their thoughts that it can be difficult to make progress. Because of the veil of shame created, people become distracted from the fact that, “Yes, I have chosen to mistreat those around me for my own temporary needs” and the path to a new set of options remains out of mental reach. Consequently, they are then unable to change or see better ways to deal with that particular choice. This is how shame is so utterly destructive; it blinds the pathway to new choices and solutions.

Once in the vicious spell of the veil’s cloud, people begin to say things like, “I feel so stuck,” “I feel so depressed and I don’t know why,” or “I just cannot seem to get out of my own way, I am so sad.” Statements like these are made by those who live in shame and do not admit that they are responsible for their choices. They wrest scraps of satisfaction from these perceived unacceptable choices they have made. These same folks may not understand fully that what they are doing actually makes them happy on some level, albeit a level of happiness that is just a mere sliver of what it could be if the veil were lifted and new possibilities came into view. Each person could be eating a full course five star meal, but the veil keeps them under the table in dark misery eating the scraps and crumbs that fall from the table. It is a lack of overall life perspective and perceived limited options that the veil of shame keeps alive. The veil is what darkens the paths to a happier existence.

Let’s look at some typical examples of short term shame-laden choices that take the place of choices that could produce much greater levels of happiness in the long run if the shame and self-pity were not in the picture.

Some parents choose to control their children through mistreatment, both verbally and physically, because they think that it is easier than making long-term loving choices and personal sacrifices for them. Some folks drink and drug for the short-term benefits these choices provide. Some couples stay in unhappy or abusive relationships for the brief moments of love that may be there. Some overeat because it provides pleasure in the short term. People make these kinds of choices for their own benefit. In many cases the negative consequences may be quite high, but they perceive the benefits as greater than the consequences.

However, this balance can change over time. Maybe the benefits begin to seem less important. Maybe the judgments of others are beginning to have more effect on you, limiting the amount of satisfaction you are getting

from your choices. Maybe your guilt is crushing you. Maybe you feel lost and out of control of your life. Maybe you want to change. Maybe, in all your guilty blindness, you know in your heart that something has to change.

## Shame Scripts

So why do people feel so guilty? Why do they feel the need to hide their choices, make excuses for their behaviors, and stay stuck in the patterns of behavior that bring such little positive return? The answer is shame scripts. Shame scripts are methods of control placed on children and others. Many of these scripts are learned and then passed on generation after generation.

Letting go of a shame script comes with a price. It means letting go of the judgments of others and standing behind your right to make your own choices based on your own judgment. You may decide that you really do enjoy the behavior. Anti-smokers may say, "You enjoy killing yourself! What is wrong with you?" The smoker rejects the shame script and responds, "My life choices are not determined by what you think is right!"

Letting go of your shame script means being honest with the world about your likes and dislikes without any shame. It also means being completely responsible for the outcomes of your likes and dislikes. This is actually a key part of maturing: becoming an adult who thinks for his or herself. Once the veil of your shame is lifted by emotionally letting go of others' judgments, you are then able to let go of your own personal self-hatred and negative self-judgments. Once that part of the process is completed it becomes much easier to evaluate whether or not the benefits of the behavior are worth the costs.

Not all the choices and behaviors that people feel guilty about are necessarily caused by others' judgments. Most people understand that some of actions are not the best options for them or their loved ones, and this causes guilt. In other cases, they might hear a judgment made that sticks in their mind and later influences them. Even such commonly acceptable behaviors such as sex, buying a new car, and being with the person you chose as a mate can be portrayed as "bad" by others, causing the individual to feel bad. A statement such as "That man will never make a good dad" from someone whose opinion matters to you can be a source of untold grief and guilt when you choose him as a husband or life partner. Other misinformed or poorly timed statements such as, "Sex is dirty," or "Why don't you just buy a used car; no need to be greedy," can build a script that makes you feel bad when, in fact, you should be happy celebrating your successes and good times.

As these scripts run through your mind, you can become downtrodden about actions that are good and positive for you. You marry the man, buy the new car instead of a used one, have fulfilling sex, and then feel deep despair and powerlessness based on these unnecessary learned shame scripts. Regardless of the script's origin, whether it is based on past standards you received from your parents and loved ones, or whether it is based on consistent negative control from your past associations or from society in general, the result is the same, you spend your time feeling judged. But this is the important part; you then accept and personalize those judgments as true for yourself and about yourself (not just about the choice itself), and then live in the veil of shame, unable to see past it.

The real problem here is not the guilt itself, but rather shame's assault on personal power and vision! The veil of shame makes it virtually impossible to see if your guilty choices and behaviors need changing. What if you want to have more fulfilling sex? What if you want to stop doing heroin? What if you want to stay in a relationship that has little return on the investment made? What if you want a divorce? What if the mate you have chosen is perfect for you, but your family objects? What if you want to leave the person whom your family picked for you? What if you want to stop abusing your children? How can any choices be made on any of the above situations if shame is in the way? How are you going to see alternatives if shame and self-pity are your focus?

As soon as guilt is removed by rejecting unnecessary shame scripts, you will be able to say things like, "I do not accept this marriage as satisfactory and I want a change. I am worth more than this," "I want to abstain from drugs and alcohol. I am worth more than this," or "I want to find a new job. I do not have to sit in a career I hate. I am worth more than this." You will be able to find potentially happier options when you finally choose to stop seeing yourself as bad and look at each choice individually on its own merits.

Know this; *you CAN change!* But first you will open a pathway by lifting the veil of your self-accepted shame. This will allow you to see who you are and why you do the things you do. You will learn to analyze whether there might be other alternatives that will bring much greater returns. Ultimately, free yourself from guilt, shame and self-pity and allow yourself to be who you are and build your future from that point. This could be the beginnings of the best days of your life free from guilt. We look forward to watching you grow and develop into the person worthy of such wonderful results!

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## CHAPTER 28

# Relationships and Forgiveness

*“This moment contains all moments.”*

– C.S. Lewis

The most common place where people use painful experiences to limit themselves is in their interactions with others; thus the way you relate to others becomes crucial to the ultimate goal of changing yourself. The following discussion includes all forms of interpersonal relationships, such as with a spouse or significant other, with a parent or child, with a sibling or close friend, or even less intimate relationships such as with co-workers and acquaintances. For the purposes of this text, relationships can be any interaction between two or more people. We are discussing here how humans need each other and why this interaction is so vital to sustainable happiness.

Relationships are the fabric that holds life together. The fact that people need each other and that we are all inherently connected on an emotional level is a fundamental truth that many people seem to ignore or simply don't know. Many times limited self-centered perspectives (combined with substance use habits) pull people away from their families and friends.

Even when surrounded by people, some of our guests are so closed off emotionally that it is impossible for others to know them in a meaningful way. When mired in a state of disconnection from the rest of humanity, loneliness can creep in, and a previously contented person may begin to feel dark and isolated. Most of our guests can relate to this. However, by this point in the program, many find they are ready to rejoin the human race and take those emotional risks and feel alive once again.

*“Try building your own fishhook sometime.”*

Earl Nightingale in *Lead the Field*.

Everything you do is influenced, indirectly or directly, by others. This concept is as important as it is unavoidable. From the smallest items you might use for recreation, like a fishhook on a fishing trip, to something as large as your home, each has been influenced by other human beings. Without your fellow humans' participation, directly or indirectly, your world would be a lonely place and nearly nothing would get accomplished. As a result of this fact, how you react to others in your sphere of influence has a great deal to do with your level of satisfaction on the happiness scale.

Societies are connected through commerce, governments, good will, religions, personal wants and needs, and, of course, love. Even people in the simplest cultures work together in teams to various degrees. Generally, the happiest people are those who voluntarily decide to spend their time participating and creating good for the benefit of others (and themselves) in their sphere of influence. They do this through purpose-driven action and desire for progress, as well as through personally driven goals. They are active in their communities, their careers, their families, and with their friends.

The question is: what sets these satisfied individuals apart from those who seem to be doing the same things and behave the same way, but remain unsatisfied and unhappy?

For example:

What about the housewife who is active in social clubs, her career, her kids' sporting events, is a great hostess at home with the family and friends, yet feels secretly isolated and depressed? She may complain that no one really appreciates her or her efforts; she's very unhappy indeed.

Or, what about those who perform these same social functions, but do so to compensate for low self-worth? No matter how many functions they pull off successfully, no matter how many thank you's are expressed by those around them, there are not enough accolades to fill the self-image crater inside their heart.

Both of these situations of feeling isolated and lonely can be rectified.

Obviously, an individual who is actually physically isolated, and who has very little in the way of human interaction with others, can decide to become more sociable and the result will be less loneliness. This is a very black and white scenario; place a recluse with cheerful people and you no longer have a recluse. However, the cases of feeling isolated listed above are not a condition created by being physically separate from others. As a matter of fact, some highly sociable people (like those described above) are intensely unhappy and lonely.

These folks are separated from others as a result of what they believe about themselves and/or others, (i.e., "I need the approval of others to be happy") or because their expectations of others are so high that no matter how outwardly successful they may be at social events and relationships, they remain unhappy with them. ("I do all this with the kids and they never appreciate what I do!") It is the cases where people cohabit with others on a sociable level, yet remain intensely unhappy that seem more difficult to rectify. But it need not be that way. The solution to these situations is actually quite simple, but it requires the willingness to change expectations of others.

Those who find real fulfillment in life socialize actively with others, but they do so with few expectations of others. Many people, who allow themselves the freedom to no longer need the approval of others for their happiness, find that many of the functions and activities they have been performing are no longer necessary. They are able to finally relax. Or they might continue performing their daily social routines as before, yet they can finally enjoy them because they no longer place their enjoyment on needing a positive reaction from those around them. Letting go of the need for positive reactions from others for our deeds, while remaining satisfied personally in

our performance, is a major defining characteristic of personal happiness. It also allows us to feel good no matter what the mood or views of others may be on that particular day.

Social relationships, whether they're between intimate lovers, or between coworkers to coworker, friends, or acquaintances, are most fruitful when they involve two individuals. This is because these sorts of relationships are give and take; both parties voluntarily sustain the relationship because of the benefits they receive from the interaction (not only receiving, but giving as well). But such relationships can result in pain, resentment, disappointment, and fizzle out when one party ceases to be an independent individual and takes on a dependent role.

In this scenario the relationship becomes one-sided and unbalanced, as someone just takes and takes from it emotionally, giving nothing in return. It may not be obvious as to how this happens, but it starts when expectations are set too high, or the dependent party simply has no self-esteem or self-approval. The dependent party then attempts to gain satisfaction through the approval and acceptance of others. Often, people take on this dependent lifestyle by latching on to all the thoughts and opinions of another person because it's easier than thinking for themselves. Unfortunately they become subservient "yes-people" in their relationships. Some people approach every relationship in a dependent role, as a young child would relate to a parent. This, then, ceases to be a fulfilling relationship for the other party, who eventually gets the sense that they're just looking into a mirror.

Maturing socially means adapting to the conditions of adult relationships, but some people never adequately adapt. It's sad to see such people as they go through one failed friendship after another, often ending with explosive interactions, or at least with a litany of resentments and complaints that they'll dump on whoever is willing to listen. Sometimes friends do hurtful things and the relationship is no longer worth the effort or is beyond repair. So at a certain point, the common denominator in all of these failed relationships must become obvious. Yet people still do not see that their socially dependent mindset is the cause. When they learn to function mentally as an *individual*, only then will they find truly satisfying relationships. They may find lasting relationships with friends who enjoy a socially dominant role, yet these will probably lead to little satisfaction and further pain as well.

The flipside is also true, that there are those who expect to dominate everyone around them to conform to all of their views and desires. They seek out malleable people

that they can use to artificially prop up their sense of self-worth. Eventually, the imbalance results in both parties experiencing little satisfaction – as both have lost any sense of individuality.

Both of these types of people are missing out on the intense joy that comes from looking within first to become a creator of joy. They haven't recognized that their happiness is in their own hands. It is only after they recognize and achieve this, that they can sustain mutually beneficial social interactions. Internally generated happiness is sustainable throughout life and allows you to live in and enjoy the moment.

If you let go of expectations of others, you are completely free to do what you want, when you want to do it, and in a manner that makes you the most fulfilled. That is the beauty and power of personal autonomy and free will. Ultimately, the more satisfied you become internally, the more productive are the outgrowths of your happiness. In other words, your light will shine brighter for the world to see. When we let go of the need for approval and we simply approve of ourselves, we allow our best character to shine for others to see. Thus, it is never selfish to be happy, as your happiness can then be given to others as a gift to those who need it.

## Fear of Emotional Risk

People fail us, hurt us, step on our feelings, assault us, rip us off, break our hearts, and die on us. They also say mean things; (we become especially at risk of being hurt by this when we are consistently asking for their approval). Any number of infinitely rude and emotionally crushing events can influence our choices. You might build emotional walls to make sure you do not get close to others emotionally. You may become the very person that you dislike by punishing those around you, thus making it very difficult to form friendships and loving relationships. You might simply shut down and make sure life does not beat down upon you anymore. But, with all that said, when are you going to live? To really live, you must love and share your love. And to love, you must be vulnerable.

## Forgiveness: A Pathway to Peace

The human condition can be painful. That is the simple reality for all people. Within that fact, there exists the fear of pain and our deep desire to avoid it. But beyond the physical world is a place that is untouchable by others; this is the place where the mind and soul exist. It is what

makes each person unique and powerful. Within that mental world you get to choose to forgive those who hurt you, or you can choose to project your pain and anger outward, thus creating hate, resentment, and self-destructive emotional pain.

In order to choose forgiveness over resentment, a simple truth needs to be understood: you do not need to agree to the offending event or situation; rather, you can simply forgive the individual who caused the painful event in your life.

A rape victim does not need to emotionally reconcile the act of rape. A victim of theft does not need to agree with thievery. An abused child does not need to accept that beatings and verbal assault are somehow ok. Forgiveness does not require acceptance of the offending situation, it simply means to emotionally release the hate within you for the *offender who caused it*. In other words, events that are painful enough to require forgiveness of the offender do not require any understanding or even acceptance of the offensive event or situation. The painful memories of these events will always be there but they do fade with time if you let them. You can remain in complete disagreement with the events of the situation and yet still move on to productive, loving lives through forgiveness' perfect doorway. The memories of painful past events will slowly fade and you will learn from your experiences. For full healing to occur, however, forgiveness is given to the offender and forgetfulness (or lack of future mental resources) is given to the situation or event.

We realize this is counter to the modern therapeutic model that suggests people should relive past painful events, but let us be clear here: there is enough pain in the world not to have to relive past pain and continuously relive negative experiences! As we indicated earlier, the research evidence finds no support for cathartic or other techniques involving the reliving of earlier pain.

The human existence is a struggle and it is built with a natural tendency to face difficulties already. Why relive pain more than the one time it struck? Why not learn from these unfortunate experiences and throw yourself into activities that distance you from that pain? Why not forgive and then forget, as they say?

Forgiveness also does not require that those offended remain tied to their offender either. One can forgive and also physically move on with life. In many cases forgiveness is the emotional release of the past hatred and the event that caused it, while simultaneously, physically distancing from the cause (the offender) of the emotional pain. Many successful divorcees can relate with these two facets of forgiveness.

So the question with forgiveness is this, do you want to move on with your life smiling at the future? Or do you want to trudge forward, looking back with profound sadness, reigniting the past pain and making it a present event in your mind's eye? You get to choose.

Here is the process of forgiveness in a nutshell:

1. Decide to move forward in your life by making the conscious decision to be happy, moving away from the past event that caused the original anger, pain and hatred.
2. Forgive the individual that hurt you (this is much easier if you complete step one with serious conviction). Always remember that your hatred binds you to the object of your hatred. It is only by letting go of it that you will be free from it and the object of it.
3. Understand that you are not required to agree with the offending situation or event and that it is alright to dislike those painful moments in time. The situation itself is not the same as the person who created it. In other words, you forgive *people*: yourself and others, but you cannot *forgive events as they are not living things that can accept it*. Forgive the offender, disagree with the offense, and move on with peace looking toward the future. This does not mean that you have to like the offender or have any relationship with them in the future, forgiveness is simply choosing to let go of animosity.
4. Keep in mind that forgiveness is not for the benefit of the other person, it is for your benefit. You are the one who benefits every time you forgive.
5. Allow yourself the freedom to know that as you move forward with hope for a better future, the sting of the painful event will become smaller in the context of the ever-growing larger life you are living. Items one through four in this list define the true culmination and definition of "forgiving and forgetting."
6. Always remember that many millions throughout history have forgiven in unbelievably painful situations, and that your mind is free to forgive anyone. It all goes back to number one; do you want to be smiling or frowning as you move toward your future life? The choice is up to you and always has been.

## Are You Going to Remain a Complicit Victim?

If you consciously decide to live by the need for approval from others, then you can't really be angry when those same people do not provide the kind of affection or attention you feel you deserve. When you hand over the reins of your happiness to others, you also relinquish your right to judge their opinions about you as wrong or unacceptable. In these cases you have no right to become resentful, as you have already accepted their opinions as the truth about yourself. Of course people do become resentful in these very situations, but that does not mean that you have not placed yourself in the position to be run over emotionally. When people place themselves in a position to be ruled, it's not productive to be upset when the ruler disagrees with you and acts in opposition to your needs and desires. Knowing that you have handed the reins of your happiness to someone other than yourself, and also knowing the past results of doing so, do you really want to continue to give away your happiness so freely? Do you want the satisfaction of your daily efforts be up to individuals over whom you have no control?

Maybe it makes more sense to bring your locus of control internally and simply enjoy the fruits of your labors? Maybe you are ready to know that ultimately the only one whose opinion matters is your own? Maybe you are ready to let go of the need for approval and simply set goals for yourself that make sense to you and provide happiness?

## Forgive Yourself

Forgiving those that hurt you in the past free you from your past. The same can be said for forgiving yourself for your past choices and behaviors; it too frees you from a painful past. So much of the forgiveness process hinges on a personal desire for change, and personal change requires a foundation of willingness.

This component in the forgiveness process is so important that we will rewrite it here:

Decide to move forward in your life making the conscious decision to be happy by moving away from the past event that caused the original hatred (negative feelings) to well up inside of you.

Much like forgiving others for wrongs committed, this applies to those situations or actions you have taken that have contributed to your self-hatred. Are you ready to look those situations in the eye, be committed to change

yourself, and then finally forgive yourself? You can free yourself from self-loathing. You have the courage to allow yourself to be free and finally move forward.

Throughout the decades of helping people we have heard many stories of self-hatred. But we have witnessed just as many people realize that much of their self-destructive self-hate was written in their psyches as children. For some guests years of sexual abuse led to promiscuity, which led to repeated heartbreak and embarrassment. For others verbal assaults from schoolmates led to self-loathing. Still for others repeated harassment and harsh criticism from a parent led to self-hatred.

The list of reasons for our self-loathing are as varied as the human experience, yet one defining characteristic seems to remain constant; self-loathing tends to be situational. In other words, it is learned from a specific set of circumstances or events. As with all learned attitudes and behaviors, all people can choose to think differently. They can decide to stop behaving in the same manner or see themselves in a more positive light, and the future then becomes open for a new manner of living. Once a decision to change their personal perspective is made, then the individual can let go of their self-hate. He can finally say, "I am worth more than misery and self-destruction, I am worth happiness! I am willing to forgive myself and move forward."

If for some reason, there is a situation that cannot be changed, (such as a man is confined to a wheelchair from birth and dislikes himself and his situation); that same individual may have only one option to let go of their self-hatred, and that is to rise above it emotionally. Life is ultimately lived by what we create internally, both emotionally and mentally, rather than the physical circumstances in which we find ourselves. For example, you can look at the incredible low rates of happiness of people one year after they win the lottery! Outside circumstances are certainly shining down upon the winner, yet many winners report being quite unhappy within a year of their winnings being deposited. These folks quickly learn that outside circumstances cannot provide happiness; that they must create that part internally.

If you decide to accept who you are at your core level first, then it becomes much easier to let go of any self-loathing you may be carrying about your circumstances in life. For instance, consider the disabled individual in the previous paragraph. At his core, he is a whole human being in that he can think and feel like any other human. After understanding this he can decide to further define his situation as, "I am a human being who happens to use a wheelchair." At this point he identified his intrinsic *core value*, and he can then examine his

physical circumstances as a place to work out his human challenges.

That is the great test of human existence; to rise above your self-perceived limitations and limiting self-talk, especially self-hatred scripts of the past. Regardless of your past, your current troubles, your lack of physical freedoms or liberties, your economic conditions, or your physical health challenges; if you make a decision to make yourself happier internally and thus more fulfilled, you will have succeeded over all the physical aspects of life. Your core being can only be affected by outside human situations and circumstances if you compromise your core with the virus of self-hatred first. If you can forgive yourself for both the changeable and the unchangeable aspects of your life that make up these self-hatred scripts, then you will have climbed a human mountain with much brighter vistas ahead! If you can see your core for the perfection that you are, then you will be able to forgive yourself, and then forgive others.

We hope by this point that you can see that the theme of this program is motion; moving forward, changing, adapting, and seeing that the world is there waiting for you to thrive. It is through changing yourself that new opportunities for happiness arise. Life can be quite difficult for those people who sit and wait for the world to change for them, or for people around them to perpetually approve and feed them emotional energy. Negative beliefs about yourself and the world around can cause extreme dissatisfaction, but your ability to forgive those around as well as yourself can free you to move past where you are today. Are you ready to move forward and *forgive and forget* a painful past?

It is our sincerest hope that if you have struggled with self-loathing, self-hate scripts or forgiving yourself and others that you will now choose to change. We hope that you will consciously let go of any painful self-hatred or the pain that emanates from your current hatred or resentments towards others. With the willingness to let go of those toxic thoughts, you can then truly forgive and, over time, all those painful memories that once ruled your life will diminish, until they are forgotten. You can stop living in the pain of the past, enjoy the moment, and feel the deep sense of satisfaction that comes with knowing you're moving toward a brighter future.

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## CHAPTER 29

# Living for the Moment... And the Future

*“The best way to predict the future is to invent it.”*

– Alan Kay, American Computer Scientist

During the process of self-analysis many of our guests come to the realization that over time they limited themselves to many choices that offered only a small amount of actual happiness. Through a continual process of learning to say “no” to life, they stifled their souls and settled for the easiest and least fulfilling options. Each day was then filled with choices based upon painful experiences from the past or fear of the future. They said “no” to new experiences, “no” to new friendships and love, and “no” to any activity that required even the smallest degree of unknown risk or made them vulnerable in any way. Then they moved toward low level happiness choices that were accompanied by great pain, simply because the pain was known. The emotional rut they dug for themselves with these limited cognitive strategies usually became deeper and deeper, with no apparent way out.

Often, they believed that the only way out was saying, “to hell with it!” and seeking immediate gratification from some new activity. The new activity seemed exciting at first, but usually proved to be another shortsighted path to nowhere. This, in some sense, is the romantic idea of “living for the moment,” but it just didn’t pan out well for them. It offered no long term satisfaction. Whether it was hooking up with a new mate, moving to a new city, trying a new drug, heading to the casino or buying a new handbag, their happiness was fleeting and they were left feeling more empty and alone.

You cannot force internal happiness. The emotion and feeling of happiness is a byproduct of purpose and

actualized goals that are worked at daily. For example, if you have a personal drive to work on a project of building low-income housing, happiness is created during the process of construction as a result of your hard work and the mission itself. Find a worthy goal and in the process of achieving it, joy will be yours. This is very important to understand.

Many are driven by the illusion that happiness is somewhere down the road and that it is “out there” waiting for them. They believe that maybe when a goal is achieved there will be happiness in that moment of achievement. While this is true, it can be quite a hollow victory because it is so brief. They do not call mountain climbing “summit hitting!” That’s because the majority of the process is the climbing portion, not the brief moment at the summit. Climbing to the summit of a mountain is, by its very nature, a challenging and sometimes painful process. It will be that much worse for you if your only goal is to reach the top. If you do not like mountain climbing, then for heaven’s sake, do something else. Hitting the summit is a comparatively brief respite in a sea of effort to get there. Find goals and lifestyle activities that have a high return during the process of attaining them and your time will be well spent. We can’t downplay the power of bright endpoints and lofty purposes, and the fact that knowing you’re moving toward such things brings great fulfillment along the way. And yes, there is the “no pain, no gain” view of life, and to a certain degree it’s true. However, when you’re deliberately creating goals, it

only makes sense to choose things in which you have a passion for both the endpoint and the pathway to get there. What do you love; and what do you love to do? Do you have the courage to accept that your own passions are worthy just for the sake that they are yours?

Unfortunately, most people believe and live their lives by the idea that as soon as a goal is fully attained, happiness will shine on them. While this moment of pure joy can exist, why not enjoy the entire trip of getting there as well? Why must you hold out the feelings of satisfaction that naturally lie in the many small steps towards attainment of the goal? Why not enjoy the trip as well as the destination? If you only allow yourself to feel happy when a goal is achieved, you limit your satisfaction to snippets of time, rather than a consistent stream of fulfilling present moments. In summary, if you integrate the following into your daily activities, you will surely increase your level of satisfaction in life:

- Set goals.
- Enjoy the trip of attaining the goals...
- ...and allow yourself not to be run by the expectations that others will approve of the goal or approve of the path you have chosen in attaining it.

“Holding out till the end,” is a recipe for perpetually feeling dissatisfied in the present, waiting for happiness somewhere “out there”. While it’s good to have goals and deadlines and a vision of the future as part of your path to greater fulfillment, don’t forget to smell the roses *as you work to attain those goals*. Are you now willing to recognize that the potential for personal happiness exists here, all around you, right now, regardless of your circumstances? If so, then let’s begin the actual process of self-directed change.

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## CHAPTER 30

# Self-Image: The Beginning

*“What is necessary to change a person is to change his awareness of himself.”*

– Abraham Maslow, American Psychologist

## THE LIFE MOVEMENTS PROCESS

1. The Present: Know and analyze current self-images.	2. Shatter self-limits, build new self-images, create Happiness Lists.	3. Assess your passions and your talents.	4. Create and prioritize new goals, build a future plan.	5. The Future: Fulfill your new Self-Images.
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There is no stopping you now! From this chapter on, you are going to focus your efforts on the future. Any workbook lessons from this chapter forward will be completed in Life Movements: Module 3 in your workbook. The past is over. You can now move beyond the patterns of the past. There is a distinct line drawn at this point. Your old life can now be dealt the final blow and a new life plan will begin to grow where the old one was left behind.

First, you broke the cultural connection that kept you chained to feelings of personal powerlessness so that you could make a free, fully conscious choice about your substance use habits. Then you self-analyzed your past thought and behavior patterns, both positive and negative, both self-limiting and self-expansive so you could figure out what kind of choices you want to make now and in the future. You learned how emotions, the mind, the spirit and the body can all interact for your benefit. You also gained an understanding of the fundamentals of personal responsibility, the science of learning and neuroplasticity, and every person’s amazing innate capacity for problem solving. You are aware that

at an individual’s core is a drive for greater happiness and personal fulfillment, as described in the Freedom Model Law of Universal Motivation. You also now have a keen understanding of how and when you have worked in concert with the five universal axioms or how you made little progress in life as a result of trying to work against the axioms.

If, after you have read and completed all of the previous material and workbook lessons, you are still confused about the habits and activities that brought you to this point in your life, we strongly recommend that you request a private meeting with your CBE presenter. He/she is there to help you through this process. Trying to move forward if you are less than confident in your self-awareness and are not sure of how your choices have affected your life results thus far can make implementing the changes you wish to see much more difficult.

If you have worked through the process with diligence and an open mind it is likely you have had a dramatic change in your thoughts about yourself and your past habits.

You now know exactly where you went wrong, who you hurt, and ultimately why a sense of self-confidence and personal progress may have eluded you. You are now ready to build your future and leave your negative life choices behind so let us get started on outlining the next phase of your self-directed life reconstruction.

## Self-Image

Your goal in this portion of the program is to harness the ability to adapt and change according to your life circumstances. You have an opportunity to grow past the counterproductive patterns of your past. Remember, changing yourself, your attitudes and behaviors, and your life is the most important of all reparations you can make to those you have hurt in the past. In order to make this a reality, it is crucial to have a clear idea of the future person you want to become. This is called creating a new self-image.

Your new self-image may be that of a person who is kind and handles situations productively. It might be that of someone who can be more patient, stable, loving, forgiving and productive; and someone who is worth more than the self-imposed pain that often accompanies shortsighted choices. However, if your self-image remains as it has been, you will likely remain in whatever state you have lived prior to reading this text. Therefore, to move past that state there has to be a starting point for your new life. That starting point is developing an image of the person you want to be. The successful people around you have done this and continue to grow each day. You have the knowledge, power and ability to join humanity on a more personally developed level and let go of any self-hatred, depression or any of the words that you used to describe your current self-limited state of being.

It will be very difficult to create a complete life change if you do not have a vision of yourself handling situations differently from the way you have in the past. Look at the person you documented in your self-analysis. Think about what you want to change about that person. You can focus on building on your attributes and positive qualities and talents, as well as letting go of the painful, self-destructive, or unsuccessful lifestyle that may have defined your life for the last few months or years.

Occasionally our guests have a tendency to put the cart before the horse. It is almost impossible to make true amends to the people you have hurt if you have not made the commitment to stop behaving in less mature, maladaptive ways. There may be people who may never forgive and are not interested in continuing a relationship with you. But there are others who will become willing

once you rebuilt trust through implementing your new self-image and making solid changes in your life. That is why it is necessary for you to create a new or at least a modified self-image as the starting point for your new lifestyle to become a reality.

Building a clear, detailed, concrete self-image is an important step in this process of self-directed change. As an example, can you truly make the commitment to no longer have extramarital affairs if you do not have a self-image that is fully committed to marriage? A self-image is a view of yourself that you personally hold and that you also project to the world. It demonstrates what kind of person you want to be and how you will behave today, tomorrow and the day after that. It is what enables you to gain trust and thus have productive discussions with those you have harmed in your past. We have discussed a seeking a level of maturity that is necessary for happiness and joy to be a consistent part of your life. We defined maturity as an individual's ability to adapt and change according to life's circumstances, which are always in a state of flux.

Transforming your self-image is a personal choice that you will handle situations in accordance with the Five Axioms. One of the best examples of a naturally occurring shift in self-image is the drastic changes that occur in an average person between the ages of five and fifteen. Those changes are radical and happen quite naturally. A five year old may carry around a security blanket for comfort, sit on Mom's lap and play with stuffed animals, whereas a fifteen year old may play baseball, have a part time job, play video games and hang out with friends.

Between the ages of five and fifteen a child matures and changes quite naturally. But as a child grows older changing requires more and more input in the form of conscious choices. Around age twenty, maturation occurs through willingness to change and through hard work. Once through the physical maturation process, (i.e. puberty), emotional maturation is not a natural process like the more passive changes of earlier life.

Why should progressing through adulthood be any different? Do 40 year olds handle problems the same way 15 year olds, 20 year olds or even 30 year olds do? Many unhappy adults are shocked by the maturity stagnation that is revealed in their axiom-based self-analysis. They finally see just how their unwillingness to live a purpose-based existence has diminished their quality of life. To stop this pattern, they must decide who they want to be in the future and how they will accomplish this personal conversion. The question is: *who is the person you want to be?*

## The Beginning

This is the beginning of your new life.

- Will you jump in with both feet?
- Are you willing to let go of *childish* instant gratification for things that are ultimately much more satisfying?
- Are you willing to live a purpose-based life?
- Are you willing to set goals that pull you forward with enthusiasm and regenerative power?

This transformation begins with you and a new self-image. Self-image is characterized by several components. There is your external self-image, your internal self-image and the goals that you set as a way to make your new ideals a reality.

## External Self-Image

Your external self-image is fairly straight forward. This is how you present yourself to the outside world. For instance, adolescents tend to be more concerned with external self-image than are older people for whom internal self-image seems to become more important. For example, an adolescent whose external self-image is anti-authority makes the statement that he is desperately asserting new-found independence. It may also indicate a fear of being emotionally close to others and a desire to be given space or even to be left alone completely.

Some people may project an external self-image that is intentionally offensive to others, or on the opposite end of the spectrum, very pleasing to others. People tend to illustrate with their outward appearance such as hair, hygiene, clothing, makeup and so on the qualities they want others to see. If your external self-image accurately portrays the way you want to be seen, that is, it matches your internal self-image, you tend to be quite pleased. But sometimes this may not be the case. For instance, if a woman has a low internal self-worth and on the exterior she dresses provocatively and is sexually promiscuous, that may reflect what is going on with her internal self-image which states that, "I am only worth that which my sexuality can provide in instant gratification and short-term attention from others."

In this case the external and internal self-images match, but are quite dissatisfactory for the individual who creates and owns them. If this is the case for you, the good news is you get to change both images (if you choose to) for a much more satisfying life experience!

Of course there are times where a person's internal vision of themselves is in conflict with their external image. For instance, if a person is obviously obese and wants to be thinner, this conflict in self-images can be unsettling and cause great grief. This person may internally long for a thinner body, while still choosing the instant gratification of food as a temporary source of happiness. However, his desire to be thin (internal self-image) does not match his external presentation that is created by his instant gratification choices. Something has to give for emotional stability to be gained in this self-image tug of war. To achieve emotional stability he must make a choice; he can continue overeating and learn to enjoy the physical results from that choice (including his obesity and the judgment of others about it), or make losing weight a priority and adjust his lifestyle accordingly. He can delay gratification by adhering to a diet and exercise plan which will match his internal desire for a fit physique. In short, he either owns his choices or he changes them.

Sometimes a birth defect or severe medical trauma can create an exterior image that cannot be altered or changed to the degree that would satisfy that person's desires. One's internal self-image can help provide emotional relief in such physically unchangeable circumstances. For example, when veterans come home from war disfigured they may find peace by accepting that their physical condition occurred on the battlefield and knowing that they sacrificed certain physical attributes for a greater cause. Veterans can adapt and make their internal self-image match the external one with "I am a war veteran and I am proud of what I have done, despite my disfigurement." And, so they should be. The same goes for those who are not genetically blessed with the prototypical "good looks" as defined by those in their culture. Barring expensive and sometimes extreme cosmetic surgeries, in some cases there are no possibilities to alter the results of one's genetic code and reach that external self-image goal. For these people acceptance of their physical attributes can be a source of relief and result in their internal self-image and emotional state becoming more in line with the unchangeable parts of their external self-image.

It is important to keep in mind that even in these cases; all people do have at least some control over their external self-image. Even the wounded veteran can modify external self-images on some level to match the way he wants to present himself to the world. Not only can people change their minds and control their emotions, in most cases they get to choose how they look and present themselves as well.

It is important for you to know what your external self-image is telling the people around you. Sometimes

people become so self-involved that they lose sight of the effect they have on others. If your external self-image screams to others that you want to be left alone, but at the same time your internal self-image desires companionship, you can see the benefits of learning that your external self image is actually pushing people away. Only when you accurately understand both your internal and external self-images can you change them to better your life. It's impossible to change what you don't know needs changing. Ask yourself these questions: are you presenting yourself in a way that says, "stay away," or "notice me," or "I hate myself, but please love me," or does your external self image say, "I am quite happy; I am open to people and enjoy others?"

Socrates, the great philosopher, is quoted in Plato's *Republic* saying "The unexamined life is not worth living." This entire program is based on self-knowledge and freedom of thought, responsibility and accountability. The easiest way to change your external self-image for the better and build a bridge between you and others is to know what is in your heart.

What motivates you? Are you still focused on instant gratification? If so, your internal self-image as a self-centered person will show through to your external self-image and will push others away. If, however, you desire change and have an internal vision of yourself as being inclusive, charitable and having an active social and career life, then your external self-image should reflect that.

Usually an internal self-image naturally brings on a consistent external self-image. If you desire to be an active substance user, (your internal self-image), then your external self-image may reflect that in various ways. You may be unkempt and wear dark clothing that states "I am someone who is 'dark' and 'complicated.'" On the other hand, you may be ashamed of your substance use and your external image might be used to hide this fact by being neat or overly and outwardly proper. Any conflict between your internal and external self-image can create problems for you. If the disparity between your two self-images is great enough it can keep you from becoming a happy, stable, relaxed adult. Eventually the facade breaks down and your true negative internal image is revealed. How many heavy substance users do you know who seemed to have it all together until they suddenly had a drunken episode that ended with public arrest, an embarrassing family situation, a highly publicized drunken marital affair, a lost career, or some other life altering problem? These happen when an external self-image catches up with the individual's true more instant gratification-based internal self-image.

Another aspect of external and internal self-images is that they both tend to attract like-minded people. Those

with anti-social external self-images can still attract others like themselves. Even the punk rock, anti-establishment anarchy movements of the 70's created bonds between those involved. They were desperately flaunting their rugged independence, but the irony is they did it together.

It is nearly impossible to be a true hermit or recluse. Even the most diehard individualists need other people to function. Substance users group together at bars, shooting galleries and crack houses to keep loneliness at bay. People are often surprised by their own desire for attention and affection when they begin to examine their current self-images. But they are equally surprised at the relative ineffectiveness of the methods they have chosen to get it. That is why people are so open to changing their self-images once they examine them in detail.

So what is your external self-image? Remember that you are what you think about. The questions you might now ask yourself are: "Is my current self-image what I want to take with me into my future? Does it make me happy? When I look at myself in the mirror, do I like what I see? What, if anything, should I change?"

In previous chapters you have learned some things about yourself. You also know about the Five Axioms and how your decisions and actions got you to this point. You have written quite a bit about your past behaviors, habits, problems and attributes. You have written about your ability to create a good day and how through the power of choice you can create unhappy ones too. You have been shown how maturity and a willingness to change will affect your level of joy and satisfaction. You are beginning to see yourself in a new and very different, yet sometimes, difficult light. You can now feel hope for the future.

This realistic hope may be the first glimmer you have had in many years. Above all else, we hope we have given you the tools for self-awareness and self-examination. You, and only you, have full control and the ability to change and rework any part or even all of your life.

You may also learn how to live successfully, leaving no doubt in your mind that the answers for your life are within you. We hope you are learning that at any point you can change direction and move yourself toward greater accomplishment and a better life. At this point you are beginning to realize that you are a good person and that the key to your happiness lies in finding what you really desire for the long term.

This brings us back to self-image. If you are going to see yourself as a new person, who and what will that new person be? Do you desire to be a professional? Do you want to be an artist? Do you want to be so much more

than a person publicly labeled a drug addict or alcoholic? Deep inside, who is it that you want to be?

There are so many different aspects to self-image that it would be impossible to explore the subject in its entirety here. However, it might be helpful to learn how others have worked through their transition from low self-esteem to a bright new self-image.

One of the authors wanted to share his experience changing his own self-image. Here it is in his words:

“This is how I reworked my life through choice and action and gained renewed self-respect.

To begin, I must describe my old internal self-image. I was fiercely independent. I feared conflict, but invited it to prove to the world that I was strong. I was arrogant to cover the fact that I was embarrassed that I had little experience with life. I was lonely and wished for valuable relationships, but had none. I was a master at temporary relationships that were on my terms, only to burn out all those around me. I was uncomfortable with love and loving, as both came with risks that scared me. Most of all, I felt the world was a predominantly cruel place from which I needed to protect myself.

My self-image also carried with it a good work ethic, and that coupled with my independence kept me functioning on a superficial level. Yet, I never felt as though I gave my abilities a real test and always felt as though I could do so much more with my life. This carried a high price of nearly always feeling like I was a fraud. I was sad and wondered why I was uncomfortable so much of the time.

As for my physical self-image, I was run of the mill. I kept a low profile and was clean cut and well kempt. I presented myself as well as I could under the circumstances and communicated with general competency. I was physically healthy and my external self-image stated rather loudly “I am someone that is reserved, and I am not that interested in you, so leave me alone.” Some people would call this snobbish or aloof.

On other occasions my physical self-image might morph into “I am interested in you.” But this self-image was presented typically when I felt quite secure with the person or social situation and believed the risk of rejection to be minimal. Between my reserved nature, lack of self-confidence, and general aggressiveness that I used as a coping strategy, my external self-image left me intensely lonely. Even those people who did come around usually got the message that I was more interested in myself than I was in them.

In summation, my external self-image did not place me in the minority. In other words, I did not look radically different from the majority of people my age. I could easily get lost in a crowd. I took the safest route, the middle ground of mediocrity. I knew inside that my social and professional abilities could have been much more and that I had settled for mediocrity at best. This thought left me depressed a good deal of the time.

My internal self-image was accurate. I was unhappy and I believed that was my lot in life. As that is what I believed, that was my reality and that is what I presented to the outside world.

I never knew anything different until I went through this process over twenty years ago. That is when I decided to change. I was given the inspiration through my presenter that everything and anything is possible. This was the beginning of my new self-image. I defined my new self-image with the following credo: I could do anything I chose to do. This thought began to define me. I am what I think, I would tell myself, and it made sense. I cut my hair, took up jogging, and decided to play the very sports that I used to ridicule. I challenged myself at academics and graduated with highest honors. These choices began to outwardly define me. I decided to see myself as a respectful person, and by fulfilling that self-image with hard work, I became an outwardly confident person. These were all choices followed by actions. But how did this transformation begin? Of course with the desire to expand my internal self-image from a fear based person, to one that would take risks, and take responsibility for greater happiness.

I thought of people I admired and a few values and virtues stood out. Everyone I wanted to emulate worked hard and was extremely committed to those around them. There were people from history I wanted to be like. Abraham Lincoln inspired me, as did Theodore Roosevelt. I studied sports figures, famous writers, and other world political figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. I decided to add their values to my roster.

I read the major religious texts and philosophical works from different eras and cultures. Most of all I watched and learned from my father, my aunt, my mom, my two business mentors, and my brothers, all of whom exhibited honest positive lives. I made a list of these people and the values and virtues that they adhered to. I cannot say enough about learning from the positive example of others. It can be the starting point for a new life development and also creates a contrast to one's current possibly negative

self-images. I decided who I wanted to be and I work every day to the present to be that person.

My self-image changed from an image of embarrassment and underachievement to one of self-confidence and achievement. I gave respect to others and thus received respect. What I presented to the world reflected back onto me many times over. Most of all, my defining characteristic of loneliness vanished as I learned to truly care for others. This one aspect of my self-image, genuinely caring for others, was so important to me that I made it my top priority. Predictably, I received the benefits of a whole new world. The world had not changed, but I had. I worked diligently at being very aware of how I was putting to practice each of the Five Axioms each day. I became much more aware of my thoughts, decisions and motives. This all became a part of my new self-image. In other words, greater dedication to self-awareness made the list and was made a personal internal priority.”

“

*Chosen fear is a form of happiness, but a very limited one.*

”

Like this author, you too, can learn from your past and begin to write the script for your future. You can start this by truly identifying, as he did, who you are today and who you want to be from this point forward. Your goals for this portion of the process are the following:

- Assess your current external and internal self-images; in other words, who are you really? The self-analysis process should have prompted many thoughts on this subject. Do your internal and external self-images match and are they satisfying to you? Do they produce the life and values you truly desire?
- Decide if your current self-images are the set of self-images you want as you move forward.
- If not, develop new self-images based on the values you want to follow in your new life.
- Know that the new self-images you will be creating in your workbook lessons are a starting point. These new self-images will be fulfilled through the goals you create throughout the rest of the Life Movements process.

## Self Images: Today and Tomorrow

Once you have identified who you are today, it's time to think about who you want to be tomorrow. Who do you

want to become? How would you like to view yourself, and how would you like others to see you? Your new self-images may require significant change. The change required is to become mature and responsible for your past, your present and your future. How will your new internal and external self-images converge to set right your past and build self-confidence for your future?

You actually have done some of the work already. You began it with the axiom-based self-analysis exercises in the earlier chapters. You learned that your perspective and thoughts about life dictate who you are. You then went on to learn about how your thoughts and actions for your entire life created who you are. Now you can use the power of choice to create a new you for the present and future.

Here is a brief example of a new self-image (yours can be as detailed as you want):

*I want to have a stable life with no more chaotic drama.*

*I need to change the way I look. Every time I look in the mirror I want to be reminded of my new goals through my updated appearance. I want others to see me differently as well.*

*I absolutely do not want to be seen as a “drug addict.” I want to shed the “addict” identity.*

*I want to be a person who is productive and looks the part. I want to be an employee that any employer would be proud to hire.*

*I want to be a more patient and kind father/mother/spouse/child.*

*I want to be honest.*

*I want to feel joy.*

I do not want to let my intellectual image stop me from experiencing good relationships. I want to be more approachable, more loving and much more tolerant, and to take emotional risks as the path to greater love.

Based on this example and your axiom-based self-analysis, you probably have a reasonably good idea of what self-image you want to build for the future. Spend some time on the workbook lessons to create your own new internal and external self-images. Make sure to spend enough time to do this thoroughly. Remember, the only person you can change is yourself. If you choose to create a new start for yourself, you will begin a process that can continue for the rest of your life. This is good news! Part

of becoming a fully developed person is the knowledge that you can continue to change and improve according to the circumstances you create and the choices you make. Your new life is yours to begin creating now.

The next few chapters will show you exactly how to get from this point, which is writing down the person you want to become, to actually becoming that new person. The entire goal setting process will be used to fulfill your new self-images! The journey between these two points

can be unbelievably exciting and life transforming. This change is what you have been preparing for during all of the previous chapters. This is the physical and emotional embodiment of making true reparations to yourself and those you love, and of living the life you have secretly been dreaming about, but believed could never happen. Not only will you achieve your dreams, but you will learn that your initial dreams were just the beginning. So much more awaits you!

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## CHAPTER 31

## Building a Bridge to Goals

*“Your problem is to bridge the gap which exists between where you are now and the goal you intend to reach.”*

– Earl Nightingale, American motivational speaker and author (1921 – 1989)

What makes you happy? You’ve been encouraged to begin the process of re-inventing yourself through concentrating on your choices and behaviors, thus building new positive daily habits. However, there is much more that needs to be done. Your new habits of thought and action are just beginning to take root. These new positive thought processes may be difficult to sustain unless you force yourself to think and act outside of your emotional, physical, and mental comfort zones. That is why the next six chapters are dedicated to helping you learn how to build a new set of positive, very specific life goals. These goals will pertain to all areas of your life and will be formulated in a written plan for your future.

This chapter is not about how to build goals. That specific process is explained in later chapters. Rather, *this chapter is about learning how to shatter self-limits*. Once you shatter self-limiting thoughts about your capabilities and options for the future, then you can build goals that fulfill your new dreams.

For our purposes, we’re going to define a goal in this way:

***A goal is a detailed plan of action that you can take to get from your current state to your desired state (In other words, your goals will fulfill your new self-images).***

Before you make goals it is absolutely crucial to know where you want to go. A goal is like a set of driving directions to get from point A to point B. Be careful not

to jump the gun and start making plans before you’ve chosen the destinations that you think will make you happiest. Our next few exercises are focused on helping you to choose your destination.

Here are a simple set of exercises that are intended to open your mind to new possibilities. The mission of this chapter is simple; expand your perspective on what you are capable of and then reel in those dreams and aspirations to achievable goals and bite-sized steps in the later chapters. Thus, you will dream big and then, in a systematic fashion, turn those dreams into reality over a protracted period of time through the goal setting process that is explained later.

If you begin the goal planning portion of the process with your standard mode of thinking, you might limit your future progress to that which makes you comfortable. This, unfortunately, may yield limited positive results. During the ABSA process, you looked at the results of various thought patterns throughout your life. Now, we are asking you to think of the difference between self-limiting pessimistic thoughts that paved the road to easier yet less fulfilling life choices and positive optimistic thoughts that aim higher. If you want greater happiness and life results, it’s crucial that you make the effort to think optimistically at this point in the process.

To set new goals without developing a new, more positive attitude would be a waste of time. That is why it is crucial for you to begin the process of building positive thoughts

and actions now. A positive plan is essential for supporting your new self-images. Below are four objectives for sustained happiness and mature, prosperous living:

**Objective 1:** Make the choice to *believe that you are worth more* than you've provided yourself in the past. This means replacing self-limiting thoughts with self-expansive thoughts (i.e. replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts). Develop a new self-image of who you want to be; one that reflects your choice to increase your self-worth. Create a big picture vision of what you want your happier life to look and feel like. All the goal setting steps you will take throughout the following chapters will be designed to fulfill these new self-images.

**Objective 2:** Shatter your *perceptions of what you are capable of* doing and having in the future. Think beyond self-limiting thoughts and vague wishes to end pain, and allow yourself to dream of happier options. Get more specific about the new activities and achievements that may help you to fulfill your new self-images. Exercise the courage to come up with real life options that will make you happier.

**Objective 3:** Build a series of detailed goals *with actionable steps that you can take* to pave the road to your new self-images. What choices are within your power to make your dreams a reality? Find out, and write them down into a plan of action. Re-evaluate and update these goals consistently. Set new ones when you achieve the old ones.

**Objective 4:** Build positive, more mature relationships. Combining Objectives 1, 2 and 3 will create the trust that may be currently missing in your relationships. The idea is to become mature, stable, and happy. These positive changes will be noticed by the people around you, and true changes will occur quite naturally. People will see that you really are a different person and over time will become less concerned about your continuing hurtful behavior. The risks of a reconciliation discussion will be perceived as minimal, giving many people you may have hurt a desire to patch things up.

Changing your past hurtful and unproductive behaviors becomes that much easier if objectives 1 through 3 are completed with commitment, integrity, empathy, and positively driven motives.

Never lose sight of the truth that your future is created by you. So, by all means, plan for the best and expect the best. Your future is in your heart, your conscience, and your mind. No matter what you may have thought in the past, you have the strength to initiate a new pattern of positive, optimistic, constructive thoughts now. Mastering this habit will bring radiance into what may have been a previously dark world. You now know that

you are supposed to love and be loved. You were created as a beautiful person, so whatever habits you learned that hid your beauty can now be undone. People who learn racism can learn to be humanitarians, those who were abused are not doomed to abuse, those who live in fear can learn to live with confidence and those who are tired and frustrated can learn to live with enthusiasm and optimism. You were, and are, meant to be free and happy. Peace is inside you. It may be hidden behind temporary self-limiting thoughts and chosen fears, but this can all change if you choose that you are worth more than the limited life results you've experienced.

It's time to get started building your new future!

*"Man is a goal seeking animal. His life only has meaning if he is reaching out and striving for his goals."* -Aristotle

*"You control your future, your destiny. What you think about comes about. By recording your dreams and goals on paper, you set in motion the process of becoming the person you most want to be."* -Mark Victor Hansen, Chicken Soup for the Soul

*"You cannot fail when, in the face of every adversity, you remain steadfast in the pursuit of your dream."* -Jerry Brown, Baldwin Research Institute

## What Makes You Happy?

In order to change and mature effectively people must first know what makes them happy. This may initially be difficult for some people to determine. Many drug and/or alcohol users have little or no idea what would, or could, really make them happy in the long term. Perhaps you have spent most of your time doing things that were expedient and produced short-term relief or pleasure. These habits became your perceived happiness. Although these activities and choices have produced a low-satisfaction rate, you remained tied to them for your immediate needs. In addition to having a fixation on instant gratification and pleasure, you may have spent so much of your mental life consumed with chosen fears that blocked out all dreams of greater long-term happiness. This section of the program is designed to help you discover the activities, goals, events, relationships, and things that will truly bring you sustainable satisfaction and fulfillment.

## Purpose and Drive

Living a life of purpose may not be immediately pleasurable, nor is it always easy and comfortable. But having a purpose does guarantee positive personal development and stability. Purpose is the foundation of a positive human experience. The Buddhists have a saying, “Life is duty; duty is happiness.” As individuals grow and come to understand that many pleasures are fleeting, there is a natural tendency to search for greater personal purpose. This self-examination usually occurs during adolescence and early adulthood. However, some people focus on pleasure alone, only to find emptiness and a need for newer more intense pleasures to take the place of the previously faded versions. *Pleasure is not the cake of life; it is the frosting on the cake of purpose.* Without purpose, people are left with a bottomless bowl of candy to eat, the first piece of which is the only really satisfying one.

As you embark on the next personal exercise, your Happiness Lists, we hope you will look for purpose behind what could make you happy. Please understand, we are not opposed to pleasure and, as a matter of fact, pleasure is one of the intrinsic values of life. But it only goes so far if it isn't accompanied by a greater sense of purpose and sustainability.

In your workbook you will begin making several different happiness lists. These lists will describe all of the different activities and things that can, and do, make you happy. Each category will cover different areas of your life. Building your happiness lists should be exciting and enlightening. Many people feel guilt whenever they allow themselves to envision true happiness. We live in a society that sends the message that happiness is for others such as the glamorous and the rich, but that average people have to be serious and toil in a life that is perpetually difficult.

One of the authors remembers that “As a child, I was taught that life is a struggle. If you endure enough strife, and prove to God that you are willing to bear the cross of life's hardships, you will get a ticket to heaven when it's all over. I now know that, yes, there are natural human challenges and even tragedies in life, but I also learned as I grew older and met successful people that happiness and fulfillment are the driving motivations that endure.”

Building a positive quality of life demands work. Those who believe in a passive existence think that theirs is the easy life, and that they have little control over circumstances. Paradoxically, this mentality results in a very difficult life. Nothing is free. You cannot eat without earning the food you need to survive. Even the homeless

must work. They need to find shelter and they need to find the soup kitchens to survive. One must ask why not take all that effort and put it into productive living that has a much greater return on investment.

Everyone faces challenges and is forced to adapt to life's continuously changing landscape. Sickness and human tragedy exist as part of life, but most people plan and overcome adversity rather than succumbing to it.

In an international study of 40 countries, citizens were polled regarding their respective levels of life satisfaction. In countries where the gross national income per person was above \$8,000 (these are considered industrialized countries) the happiness level (on a scale of 1 to 10) of its citizens did not vary more than two points, regardless income level. This tells us something about people and what makes them happy. People in this study from the less affluent countries such as Brazil and Chile reported results similar to those from more affluent nations, such as the United States, Denmark, and Switzerland. It is clear then that satisfaction is not always dependent on money or even political circumstances, but rather on how people react to their economic and political circumstances. (Seligman, 2002)

The study also demonstrates that even in countries considered oppressed, the citizens were able to make the best of it and responded to the poll as quite satisfied when compared to more liberated countries. Important is the fact that the countries with the lowest financial resources, lower than \$8,000, did not end up lowest on the scale of life satisfaction. One of the poorest nations, Nigeria was within 1.77 points of the highest ranked, Switzerland, for life satisfaction. Paradoxically, Japan, one of the highest financially ranked countries in the world was .06 points less than Nigeria!

Life satisfaction is based on cultural and personal belief systems as well as personal choices rather than on circumstances, many of which may be out of direct personal control. Relative happiness, as well as relative pain, can always be found in any environment. Therefore, it is important to look at how you react to the world around you and also why you think the way you do. Influencing a child's mind with guilt and a belief that happiness can only be achieved through pain is likely to produce an adult who will attach anything positive to something equally emotionally painful, e.g. marriages filled with bright moments, but equally shot through with intense, heated arguments, or careers with promising beginnings stifled by low personal standards and underachievement.

How many people in the world believe they should live in emotional distress because that's what they were taught? Why do some people accept unhappiness as normal? It

is because they believe it and are dedicated to that belief. They believe that is what they deserve. If you struggle with this belief, it is time to put these self-images to rest and demand more from life.

You can become a person who believes that happiness is the norm. You now recognize your power to create happiness in your life and in the lives of others. The author quoted earlier continued, “After I was told that life is a struggle, I spent the next six years hating God, hating religion, and needlessly trying to buck the system by proving that living by instant gratification had to be better than any crosses I was supposed to bear. As I grew older and wiser I met enough happy people in my small world that I learned that living as a bitter lonely kid with a chip on my shoulder was painful, indeed. I didn’t have to live from one extreme to the other. I chose a better path. I saw that I did not have to live with guilt, nor did I have to be a slave to instant gratification. I could choose to be responsible for my own happiness and I could choose to work hard for my happiness. I discovered that the simple act of working for happiness, created it. I accepted these values and like millions across the planet. I found satisfaction in my daily routines. I had accepted that ‘Life is duty, and duty is happiness.’ This one statement brought my life out of the cellar. I was also encouraged by the idea that I get to pick the duty.”

By allowing yourself to let go of guilt and then deciding to dream of something better, you can *decide* to be happy. If you struggle with guilt because of a traditional religious upbringing or if your faith is important to you but you still struggle with guilt, think about this: God created you so He could experience happiness through you. If you are not a believer in God, simply believe in happiness over misery; believe that your own personal happiness is an end in itself. Every human being is born with the potential to create and experience great levels of happiness and joy; why not embrace this as part of your nature? This in itself can be enough of a purpose to unite your choices in a positive direction. If at first you don’t feel like you’re worth the effort, why not dedicate some time to finding happiness in your life by bringing it to others. At least that way you’ll practice your nature as a creator of happiness, this alone should bring you some greater level of personal happiness, and you might just begin to realize that you’re worth more. Isn’t it much more pleasant to feel good than to feel bad? Isn’t that what you want for yourself and your loved ones?

Some people believe in a grand plan or destiny and at times they find comfort in this, but at other times the concept can be crippling. *The truth is there is no grand plan: you get to write the script. You are the author and director of your own life.* Whether you believe your

abilities are from God or just happened, it is completely up to you to use them as you see fit. That is the meaning of free will.

## Shattering the Current Standards Dreams: A Starting Point

Dreaming of a better way to live your life, dreaming of better relationships, dreaming of a more lucrative and satisfying career, and dreaming of a better tomorrow are the building blocks of human progress. You can think, imagine, and fantasize that which was never thought before. This is why you are alive, to co-create the universe. What power! What an exciting prospect!

Becoming happy and prosperous involves allowing yourself to dream. Life without dreams is no life at all. It is dreaming that allows the spirit within to talk to you. The key is to imagine your life in better and more exciting circumstances. Without a vision you cannot create the actions necessary to change your current state of affairs. In other words, without a dream there can be no goal to fulfill it. It is not by accident that people’s minds, emotions, and bodies get stronger the more they use them productively. The more often you summon your dreams, the stronger your drive to attain your goals will become, and the more exciting your life will be.

Dreams have no boundaries. Each dream is yours and can be whatever you choose. Imagine having your life just the way you want it. Imagine your life filled with what makes you happy. Then imagine and visualize in your dreams that you are achieving success after success. Pay close attention to these dreams. Visualize how happy your successes have made you. By dreaming, you have begun to set in motion the law of attraction. The simple truth is that you bring about what you think about most.

Of course, there are risks associated with dreaming. After all, what if you dream and then fail? You may eventually find that you don’t have the passion to follow through on a particular dream, that you can’t be fully immersed in all the steps needed to make the dream come true. Or you may find obstacles and other dreams along the way, and choose to give up. You might end up seeing yourself as a “failure.” You might take the risk of loving others and get hurt by their actions. You may be let down.

Consider this: don’t people experience more emotional pain if they do not allow themselves to dream? With such an approach to living, pain is almost guaranteed. As you think of “what could have been” you will live each day in passive regret. Without dreams you have no vision of the future; no real reason to exist. Your life drifts by in

an endless succession of meaningless days until finally you wonder where your life has gone and what it all meant. Don't let this happen. Everyone in the world lives under the same set of axioms, so no one is exempt from opportunities. The world is designed for your passions to be exercised. Dream in the unlimited!

Let us say it again: *dream in the unlimited*. That is specifically the purpose of this chapter: to help you expand your dreaming potential. Do not worry that your dreams may be unrealistic or silly. Hopefully to a certain degree they are; that is what dreaming is all about. The point is to let go of logic and the self-created, fearful limits people place on themselves.

If you constantly worry about being rational in life, no true discoveries can ever occur. Being perpetually logical is a guaranteed way never to pull on the spring of life. You will always remain static, unchanged, with fearful and metered progress. But, not to worry; as you get to the goals portion of the following chapters, you will have the opportunity to think rationally and place your dreams on a realistic level of expectations. However, if you create a modest baseline for all your goals, then those goals will be characterized by your self-imposed habitual limits. Conversely, if you begin your future progress by mentally stretching the limits of what you believe you are capable of, any goals you subsequently create will naturally expand your life.

To accomplish this stretching the spring of life, you will write down those items that you think will make you happy. First, imagine what would make you happy if you had unlimited time and unlimited resources. We realize this does not sound rational. It is not meant to be. This unlimited view is important. It helps you begin to dismantle a preconceived negative view that you cannot obtain what you want in life. Once again, you will be encouraged to work a somewhat extreme form of the exercise first. In thinking about your potential happiness, you want to begin by imagining what you could have in life if you had no limitations. This extreme viewpoint goes against the old belief that you are not worth happiness and fulfillment and will begin to dismantle any preconceived negative attitudes you may have held that life is a gloomy, fate driven existence. If you allow yourself this unlimited view, an internal creative force is jump-started. The law of attraction is put into motion; it is inevitable. Doors begin to open, and circumstances can be seen as providing opportunities rather than obstacles in the way of better future. You will likely find what you look for, either way; positive or negative.

## Stretching the Limits of Your Imagination: The Spring of Life

Because of the fact that *you are what you think*, the ability to think positively and optimistically is always available to support your creation of a brighter future and happier present. But this axiom also allows for negative thinking to crush and blot out your vision of the future and present into a grotesque picture of an unhappy existence with limited options and levels of satisfaction.

Your current level of thinking may still be defined by past habits of self-limiting thoughts and choices. Your most dominant thoughts are continuously creating a mental set-point (because of the principles of self-directed neuroplasticity) which is easy to default to in your daily thinking.

## The Spring of Life – The Counterproductive Stage

The Counterproductive Stage is how you may have created your old life, filled with strife, lost resources, tiresome negative habits, and a tremendous effort to force the world and its inhabitants to behave in a manner that fulfills your own immediate needs. The effort required to maintain this lifestyle is enormous and can end up being completely counterproductive. Some examples include lying to get your way, avoiding responsibility, playing the victim, using people to get what you need or want, manipulating others, and trying to force them to change to suit you.

You exerted these efforts so that you could avoid changing yourself. It's as if you were pushing on a spring that pushed harder and harder back at you. Exhaustion and frustration are typical characteristics of such a lifestyle. Holding back the spring of life and its powerful forces (axioms) is a constant struggle that wears down the body, the mind and the spirit. This stage defines the actively short-sighted and defiantly immature and those people with an unwillingness to adapt to life's constant changes.

You've likely been crushing the spring of life to the negative side by focusing on limited options, low satisfaction choices, and by seeing yourself as a helpless victim of a cruel and harsh world. You may have seen yourself as incapable, cornered, flawed, and defective. If so, you've given yourself a negative, powerless internal narrative that fuels your efforts to crush the spring down to the negative side.



For those people who are constantly negative and pessimistic, this may have been a painful process that took a lot of work, but at some point it ceased to require effort. The spring's resiliency gave way and was fully crushed to the negative side. In a strange way, those people "succeeded" by creating a new mental set-point for themselves that no longer required effort to look at the negative side of things in life. This became their norm. Their natural state of thinking became negativity and pessimism. At that point it becomes tough for this person to imagine anything positive as the task of envisioning a brighter future feels unnatural to them when suggested, because it takes effort.

### **The Spring of Life – The Known Risk Stage**

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The Known Risk Stage is a dark place to be. But people work their way out of it all the time. Even in the cloak of darkness on the negative side of life, people remember that they've seen and experienced positivity and greater happiness throughout their lives. They start to dream and think positively, and stretch the spring of life to the positive side again. It takes work, but people are surprisingly capable and are also quite resourceful when they decide to walk out of their own shadows. Many

people devise ways to stretch the spring of life on their own every day and overcome the negative momentum of their past problems. They do it without any help, and many even do it in spite of those who teach them to stay problem-centered.

One of our researchers took a call from a woman who was convinced she needed ongoing support and aftercare. He listened to her inspiring story. She had attended a popular "alternative" addiction treatment program six months earlier. She had been studying to become a nurse and as she left the rehab, they told her to wait a year before going back to school, and spend the time "working on her issues." They gave her a laundry list of specialists she needed to see in order to stay sober upon leaving the 28 day program: nutritionists, homeopaths, chiropractors, acupuncturists, and various specialized counselors. In addition, they tried to sell her a big supply of nutritional supplements they said she would need to get her brain working correctly and her body back in balance. They taught her to define herself by problems and "underlying causes for her addiction" and then to live in reaction to those problems.

She followed none of their recommendations. She went right back into nursing school and happily moved on with her vision of a brighter future. She didn't drink in a way that she considered problematic, and she wasn't unsatisfied with life during the six months that she was busy moving on with her life. Yet somewhere in the back of her mind she felt guilty for not "working on her issues,"



and following the recommendations of the treatment center. The pessimistic voices of her former counselors were still haunting her. So she called us to see if we could offer her “support.” Our researcher offered it in one sentence: “It sounds like you’ve moved on and found your solution; trust in yourself and keep doing what makes you happy.” He refused to offer any sort of a formal program for this woman because it would only be reinforcing the false notion that she needed ongoing support for her past substance use problems; it actually would be helping her to crush the spring of life. Such “help” would only serve to keep her chained to the past. It would run the risk of working against what she had already figured out on her own; that she is better off focused on a brighter future than to keep her life centered on past problems and “underlying issues.” She had already clearly shown the desire to move forward with happier options, and found success with this independently created method. She found a way to stretch the spring of life on her own.

Whether you realize it or not, you have already been stretching the spring of life back to the positive side through your work throughout this program. You have considered the role of the axioms in your life, and recognized how they can be used for positive change. You have renewed your sense of power over your life by courageously analyzing your life history and showing yourself where you have choice and control over your experience. You have created new self-images, and now you’re about to create more specific dreams.

In the same way that crushing the spring of life took a lot of effort, stretching it will take effort too. Dreaming through the happiness list exercise proves to be tough for many people, but this is the work that will help you to really get the spring moving towards the positive side. This work has helped thousands of our students to create a new, more positive mental set point. Should you choose to break the cultural connection, and be proactive about creating a better future, rather than choosing to rest on the negative side and stay problem-focused, you

will find yourself in the midst of the Improvement Stage, where you are actively stretching the spring of life to the positive side.

## The Spring Of Life – Improvement Stage

The positive stages will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters. They are the stages in which you have shifted your momentum and goals, and stretched the spring of life fully back to the positive side of life.

### Enjoy the Process

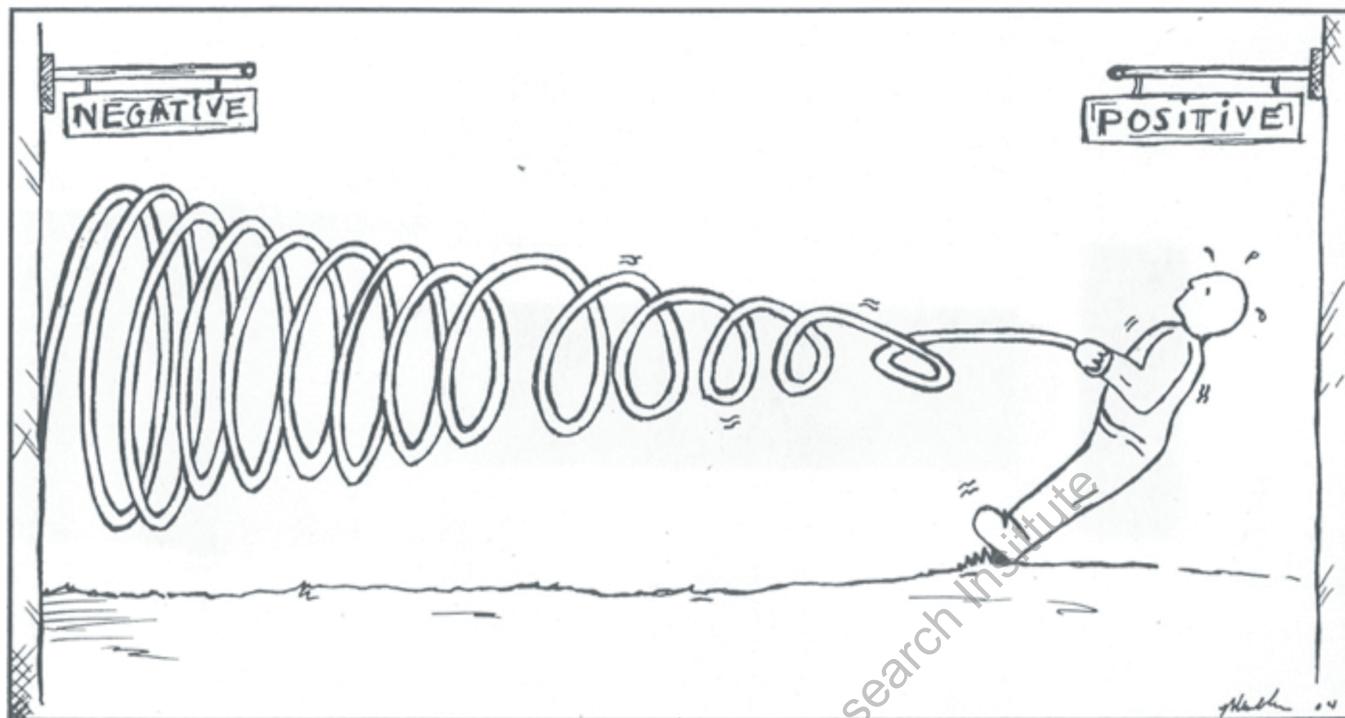
You have spent a lot of time in this program analyzing the past in great detail. You have been encouraged to let go of past pain, hurtful habits and fearful thinking. Those aspects of your life that you described in your axiom-based self-analysis as positive, encouraging and exciting will now be amplified by the following chapter lessons. We live in a culture that views substance use and other low-satisfaction choices as irreversible life sentences. We have clearly shown how this view is inaccurate and harmful. Now, you can allow yourself to grow and experience what life is meant to be. Do not listen to anyone who says you must limit yourself and define your future by your past problems.

Give yourself the opportunity to move on by developing goals for a brighter future. It is time to get started on your new life by adopting an unlimited perspective.

In your workbook you will be writing out Happiness Lists that will help to dream with limitless boundaries and think about what would truly make you most happy. What would you like to gain or achieve if you had no limitations. Remember, these lists are not your goals; you will create your goals later on.

This exercise is split into the following categories:

- Spiritual
- Emotional
- Physical,
- Sexual/Relationship,
- Material
- Financial
- Family,
- Social,
- Career,
- Miscellaneous



Under each of these categories ask yourself what you feel needs to change to bring you a happier future. Do not limit the things you desire. Write them all down. Have fun and be self-indulgent. This is one of the times when self-indulgence is really encouraged, so go for it!

People can easily convince themselves of many things that are not true. When you look over your lists, make sure you are allowing yourself to dream. Do not write things you think you should be writing down or that you think others want to hear. Remember that only you will see this list. During this exercise do not be embarrassed to write what you really want. This honesty is necessary if any improvements are to be made in the long run. If you do not have the courage to admit what it is you really want out of life, how can you begin to work toward it?

If you find the idea of this exercise difficult because you are unsure of what will definitely make you happy in the future, you can begin by writing what you think might make you happy. That is why it is called dreaming and not called knowing. The purpose is to expand thinking.

Actually, most people start in this indirect way; they guess at what they think would make them happy. Most of our guests have been living in relative isolation with little in the way of joyful purpose. So we expect a certain amount of initial uncertainty in this process. The end game of attaining goals and building inner purpose is usually a process of elimination. In the final analysis, you may find that as many as eight out of ten of the items in each category above

are things that really won't contribute to your happiness, or won't fit in with other more important items on your lists. This is completely normal. These items will slowly be removed from your happiness lists to be replaced by new items as time passes and you gain more life experiences. This technique of creating written happiness lists and then basing a goals list upon your happiness list will become a habitual method that repeats itself to form a working part of your constantly improving future.

The process of elimination will be worked out over a period of months and sometimes years after you complete the first version of your happiness lists and the subsequent goals lists. Nevertheless, you will be living your new lifestyle as you mark off those goals that brought greater fulfillment and delete those that do not. You will be constantly revising the happiness and goals lists as you discover more about your likes and dislikes. This process is reminiscent of Thomas Edison's experiences while trying to invent the light bulb.

Once during an interview, Mr. Edison was asked, "You have tried to make hundreds of metals glow in this thing you call the light bulb, and nothing has worked. Aren't you getting discouraged by all these failures?" Mr. Edison replied, "Failures? I have not failed at anything. I have succeeded in finding 1,000 things that do not work, bringing me that much closer to the one that will."

Finding your way through life is just a series of attempts at goals that should be based on what makes you happy.

You might discover that in time, the majority of happiness list items you wrote down will not satisfy you, but those that do are like the light created by Mr. Edison, they change the future forever.

The difference between success and failure in life is really quite simple. You can keep trying until you do discover lasting happiness, or you can quit trying before you find

those things in life that do satisfy and bring you joy. Do not be discouraged as you make your way through this process but allow yourself to dream. Simply write down the first ideas that come to your mind in each category in your workbook lesson, even if they seem ridiculous. Get excited and have fun. This is the beginning of building a happy future.

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## CHAPTER 32

# Passion - The Foundation of Goal Setting

*“A strong passion for any object will ensure success, for the desire of the end will point out the means.”*

– William Hazlitt, English writer (1778 – 1830)

Any time the topic of personal dreams and goals is broached, a discussion about talents and abilities naturally comes up. Are talents learned or are they innate? Most would say they are innate; that you are a “born runner,” “a natural leader,” you are “a talented cook,” etc.; but is this really true?

If talents are built into our DNA then those who struggle to find their talents cannot help but feel cheated. This is especially true for people who live unsatisfying, depressing daily routines, feeling devoid of purpose or talent. This painful existence becomes even more agonizing when observing others who seem to have found their talents and use them to become successful and happy. We are going to take a factual look at where talents are created in an effort to level the playing field a bit and give those who are struggling to find their talents a chance to create their own success. But, before we outline the remaining steps to building goals, we must address the fundamental question, are talents innate or are they learned?

When polled, most people believe that each person is born with certain innate talents. One of the reasons most people believe this is because of our culture’s fascination with people whose looks or body type match their talents. For instance, a tall man becomes a very good NBA basketball player; a beautiful woman becomes a world famous model; the geeky guy grows up to be a world-renowned scientist. All of these individuals gave credence to the common misconception that people are born to behave in a certain manner based on their

body type, looks and size, and thus that they were born with certain advantages over others. Most people look at these individual examples and believe that being born with certain physical attributes must equal having certain talents. It’s a classic case of anecdotal evidence being misleading.

This erroneous belief is caused by the tendency to match visual cues to preconceived ideas we have about people, in general. For instance, it is not difficult to say that the tall professional basketball player has a “natural talent” for the sport. But if that same tall person were a great lawyer, the reaction would not match and we would not comment as readily about the talent of the individual.

People’s idea of talents tends to be based on how a person looks over all else. This is especially true in the media-driven Western culture. For example, there are a much larger number of tall people who have talents in other fields than those who are tall and have become accomplished NBA players. But, because these more common scenarios do not match visually, they are simply ignored. If the visual cues match the preconceived idea about talents, then the connection between tall and basketball must be true, i.e. tall equal’s talent for basketball. Tall, however, does not equal talent for accountant. So the connection between accounting talents and tall, in the case of the tall accountant, is far less commonly made. Naturally, because our culture places talents and physical attributes in the same class, we tend to highlight those cases that match this belief to bolster the idea that talents

come from genetic markers at birth. “She was born to do so and so, because she is graceful, athletic, pretty, and so on.”

Because the vast majority of individuals do not follow these physical/talent descriptions, (i.e. most tall people around the world do not play basketball) why do so many people make these generalizations in such a dramatically inaccurate way? Why do we say that people are “born” to do something when, in fact, most people in that specific demographic do no such thing? And further there are many who become successful in a particular area whose appearance doesn’t match expectations; such as the NBA player who is less than 6 ft tall.

The answer is Western culture’s preoccupation with physical attributes. There is a tendency to want black and white answers to human problems. Being that the human condition is filled with struggle, most people desire to make that struggle a little easier to tolerate by looking to those examples of humanity that shine. That is easy to accomplish by looking at those people who make the human struggle look a bit easier, more victorious, and more successful. The NBA star that is tall, lean, and puts up 40 points per game effortlessly is inspiring; it’s what we like to see. Visually, it all makes sense; NBA stars are born tall and lean, therefore the perception is that they “had it easy;” they were “born to be basketball players.” This same misperception is made by millions each day; and it can make people feel powerless and inferior. It also takes the pressure off people to achieve what they truly want, because they feel inferior. “I wish I had what that man has. He is so lucky.” “She was born so small and graceful; no wonder she is such a great jockey. She has so much talent!” “He is a born leader; I could never take men into battle like that!”

By making examples of talent tied to a physical attribute, people are then able to justify their own self-perceived failings. Most people do not possess physical or even intellectual attributes that give them a perceived leg up in this world. Consequently, many accept themselves as mediocre, talentless individuals who struggle. This tendency to compare yourself to others is very important and it underscores much of why people write-off their abilities and passions so easily. If you can point to people whose talents are clearly connected to their genetics (e.g. body type, athleticism, beauty, musculature, IQ, etc.), then the reality that you might be born less gifted gives you a convenient out. Your failures in life can be linked to not being gifted or blessed as others who are *more fortunate* have been.

This inevitably leads to the unbecoming feeling of envy; “If only I were tall, then maybe I would make an NBA paycheck like him.” By focusing on what others are born

with it becomes quite easy to see what you were born without. That is the trouble with the misconception that people are born to be something when, in fact, people are born with the free will to become whoever they want to be. Once a comparison to others is made, then making excuses for personal failings become easy to justify; after all I was not born to be such and such like her.

It’s important to understand that this perspective is willfully distorted. Many people choose to only look at those who fit the dominant model in a given field. Yet, if you chose to look for it, in the example of NBA players, you will find that there have been much shorter, very successful players. For example, Muggsy Bogues, at a height of 5’3”, had an NBA career that spanned 15 years; and in his first season he coincidentally played alongside one of the tallest players in NBA history, who was a full 28 inches taller than him. One of the shortest point guards to play in the NBA, Spud Webb stunned the country winning the 1986 NBA Dunk Competition. At 5’7” he beat players as much as 2 feet taller than he was. Had these players focused purely on the difference in physical traits between themselves and other players, they wouldn’t have achieved their NBA careers. Professional athletics are filled with these kinds of stories of people seemingly beat the odds.

When people look at others in an envious manner, they give little thought to the personal sacrifices made by the target of their jealousy: the dedication, extreme effort, long hours, as well as the setbacks and failings along the way. All people who achieve greatness have endured failure, yet their commitment, desire and passion to be who they are was greater. People assume that their physical stature and circumstances provided the springboard for their success in life. But like everything in life, what we see on the outside is a result of what is first built on the inside. And because of that simple fact, it is impossible for anyone to know what really caused someone to become the person they became. It is important to understand that personal choice, childhood mentors, personal habits, attitude, motives and passions, mean far more than physical attributes when it comes to achieving success.

Of course, being tall certainly helps those in the NBA compete. But why hone in on the tiniest percentage of tall people who play professional basketball, when most tall people are not NBA players? Why base your ideas about how talents are formed based on a tiny percentage of people whose physical attributes happen to match their chosen successes in the world, when there is a vast majority for whom this connection does not exist at all? If you want to know whether talents are created in your DNA or are learned, you must look at the human race as

a whole rather than a tiny percentage of humanity that supports the DNA/talent connection.

The greatest motocross racer of all time, Ricky Carmichael (he has been nicknamed “the GOAT”, which is greatest of all time by his peers,) is a wonderful example of someone who struggled to become who he is and who seemed to possess little in the way of genetic advantages in his chosen field of work. Yet, Ricky Carmichael became an exceptionally talented motocross racer. He is a very interesting case to examine.

By all accounts Ricky was never seen to be naturally gifted with the correct body style for a motocross racer of that era. It was assumed that when he moved up to the premier class of bigger bikes in the pro ranks, he would struggle because of his atypical body type. The sports pundits of the day believed that Ricky did not possess the more typical lanky, long legged frame that was considered the necessary body type for holding the competitive edge in that style of professional motorcycle racing. He was seen to be too short, too stocky and too small, to ever rise to the level of multi-champion in the premier class of US motocross. Here is an excerpt from a blog article about Carmichael:

*Winning has come at a price for Ricky Carmichael and it has certainly not been a walk in the park for this athlete. In his younger days he was a short, stocky lad and his enthusiasm and determination was enough to make him #1. However he struggled with his transition to the 250 class (as many pros do) and quickly realized that he needed ‘that something else’ to win against the big boys. Part of his problem was that he couldn’t throw around or control his heavier 250 like he could on his 125. Ricky was often seen hanging on desperately to his bike or even getting thrown off wildly onto the track. He knew that he needed to change something, so he began an intensive fitness training program that focused on building his strength. This proved to be a winning formula and it was exactly what he needed to keep him on the podium.*

*When you take a quick look at champions like Ricky Carmichael, it’s all too easy to think that it’s just talent and luck that makes them who they are. But when you delve deeper into their lives you often find that there has been a lot of blood, sweat and hard work along the road to success. And in the world of motocross I don’t think you could find anyone for who this is truer than it is for Ricky. He was so disciplined in his training that he trained from*

*sun-up to sun-down and even referred to it as “Groundhog Day”. Whatever it takes huh? (www.dirt-bike-tips-and-pics.com)*

Ricky became the *winningest* motocross racer of all time and the only racer in history to have two perfect winning seasons among his 15 championship titles! This from a young man never thought to possess the body type and genetics to become competitive in motocross racing.

So be very careful not to pigeonhole yourself based on your physiology or genetic make-up. If you follow the conventional wisdom that physical attributes are necessary for successful careers and/or activities, you must be willing to ignore the Ricky Carmichael’s and Spud Webb’s of the world, and that would be tragic. While there will always be people whose physiology matches their passions, there are millions of others, like Carmichael and Webb, where this is not the case at all.

This is so important because in order for people to discover their talents they must first find passion for a certain goal or activity. Passion is the foundation that builds talent, not the bodies or brains that provided by genetics. There are, of course, other factors that play a supporting role that makes each personal goal easier to achieve. How did you grow up? Who were your mentors and who are your heroes? What drives you? Ultimately, what do you love to do; what makes you happy? It really does come right back to these things. Talents are formed from a grouping of variables, many of them being much more consequential to the successful outcome of your goals than your body type.

Of course DNA does play a role. If you’re confined to a wheelchair from birth, you might find it very difficult to be a hunting outfitter in the high Rocky Mountains, no matter how passionate you might be for this activity. But, if you were in great shape and did not have those limitations you might make a fantastic hunting guide. So obviously, physical limitations may be a factor in your ultimate choices in goal setting. But that is the point; talents are born from passions that come from a variety of emotional sources and personal experiences, and then are driven by our likes and dislikes. It is only after all of those factors are considered that the physical attributes or limitations should be examined for the affect they will have on that particular goal. Our body shape and style is one small factor among a long list of other factors that reign supreme when in search of your personal desires and goals.

Once Carmichael became fully committed to his passion, it was discovered that this stature (or lack of it) had its advantages. No one could match his corner speed because he had a lower center of gravity. His passion

exposed other advantages that added to lowered lap times; like his fitness level allowing for consistency, confidence and speed. And, no one could have predicted his level of commitment and the passion that drove him past where his competitors were willing to go in their training regimens. Had passion not driven him to out train his competition, these other advantages would never have been discovered, much less exploited in 15 national titles.

Anthony Robles, the former 125 pound NCAA wrestler from Arizona State University won the NCAA title in 2011 with a record of 36 wins and 0 losses. Roble was born without a right leg. And, he did not even start wrestling until his junior year in high school! To say he had genetic, as well as experience deficiencies, for his passion would have been an understatement. Yet, after two unsuccessful attempts at the NCAA championship, he won it all in his senior year with an undefeated record. His passion ruled supreme!

Why are people so accepting that one individual can find their talents so easily while others seem to struggle to find theirs? The answer lies in the tendency to avoid looking at the facts in detail about topics that make them uncomfortable. Let us explain. In the case of talents, people avoid looking at the hardships all successful people have endured to achieve their high level of success, as that would require them to do the same. People avoid that because it means they, too, must pay that price for success and talent in a given vocation. It is much easier to pass off their talent, or lack of talent, as a product of genes, luck and circumstance.

As people look out at the world, they naturally tend to search for answers to their daily struggles. They tend to compare their lives to the lives of those more *talented or fortunate*. One question that goes through the minds of the downtrodden and depressed is, "Why does *Mary* seem to have it all. I wish I had been born with that kind of talent." This statement supports the idea that one person is given much, while others are given less, at birth. And, while this may be true in a physical sense and in other cases intellectually, the vast majority of people are provided exactly the same potential to build their respective talents. While the economies, political environments, physical statures, and intelligence of people do vary, two very important universal human traits level the playing field dramatically: free will and passion.

We are not saying that some people do not have it harder than others. That would be untrue. Ask a Jew who survived the holocaust the price of being born in Germany at the beginning of the last century. Some circumstances are truly beyond your control. So, this discussion on talents is not a question of circumstances,

nor is it a discussion on the genuine raw deal some folks must overcome. Rather, it is simply the question of whether those who are born into/unfortunate circumstances are relegated to a certain set of pre-determined talents, or are they blessed with a freedom of mind which allows them to create a set of talents that can provide a path out of those difficult circumstances. Are you destined to have a set of genetics that limit your free will or can you truly build the life you want?

One of the authors has a friend, Terry, who is mentally and emotionally challenged. Many would say that his DNA relegates him to a path that is painful and limits his world. Some might even call him a misfit. Let us address this head on: Terry is different, but his free will is *not* different than yours or mine. He can decide to do whatever he wants and in his desire for a good life, he does exceedingly well. He is one of the best manual laborers I have seen. His capacity to remain focused on jobs that would bore others to tears borders on genius. He is capable of getting work done that others cannot or will not do. Most of all he takes massive pride in his effort and is blissful while doing it. He is happy. Is this not the embodiment of his talent; the ability to focus on a task others would struggle to do? Should he not be proud of that single-minded focus? The fact that he, himself, is intellectually challenged does not factor into his happiness. Terry has learned to *focus on what he is capable of doing in his world, not on what he cannot do*. Because he does not spend his time lamenting his obvious mental challenges, but instead focuses on what he can do, (and has become an expert in it) he remains a very satisfied and talented human being!

If people spend more time concentrating on their passions and less time looking at others who seem to have it better, they would find happiness as Terry has. They would find their talents and discover many more as time passes. They would grow as individuals, rather than sit in self-pity and self-justification of their failures.

How is his case any different than say, a successful neurosurgeon? Terry does not have the passion or the intellect to become a neurosurgeon. Does that make Terry any less capable in his range of talents? If we compare and contrast Terry's lifestyle, income, and fame with those of the neurosurgeon, Terry will always fall short. If Terry also concentrated on how successful the neurosurgeon is, rather than concentrating on his own passions, he too would miss out on creating his own talents.

This is how envy impacts talent. It displaces joy, our pursuit of passion, and immersion potential with a set of distracting thoughts that are ultimately and totally irrelevant to our personal situations. Envy makes the standard of others more important than your own personal standard

for yourself. It places happiness on a standard you can never achieve, because your passions lie elsewhere. If we were to place Terry in a leading university to become that neuroscientist he would fail. But he would not fail strictly because his IQ is not high enough, although that is true. He would fail primarily because his interests are in other areas, and neuroscience demands one's full attention, which Terry would never be able to give it. How sad it would be to judge Terry as incapable when, in fact, in his joy-filled life he is a genius. He has maximized his existence with activities he personally loves. Much like neurosurgeons who sacrifice decades of their lives in preparation for their goal, Terry has sacrificed thousands of hours toiling and perfecting what he is great at. What success! What talent!

Let us reverse the argument. Could the neurosurgeon be as talented at manual labor as is Terry? Maybe, but it may be more likely that the neurosurgeon's intellect level would hinder him from performing thousands of hours of repetitive labor. He would probably find that after months of intense, repetitive exhausting labor, that he yearns for more intellectual stimulation. While this is hypothetical, it makes the point; your talents lie in many factors, not just the raw genetic material you possess.

If you believe that your talents are written in your DNA, or are a result of a pre-coded physical nature, then you may be in real trouble. With the loss of your choice-based free will, you lose the ability to dream and the ability to create who you are and what you decide to be talented at doing. That is your gift to the world. Your joy-based talents will guide you to overcome extraordinary obstacles.

Looking at history, millions of people have overcome tremendous obstacles to achieve what they desire. A group of Jewish prisoners during WWII escaped the Treblinka concentration camp with all odds pitted against their success. We see folks who overcome poverty in the ghettos of cities around the globe. And, we see a young man, Terry find his place in the world excelling in what he wants to regardless of how the world might judge him. It takes very specific focused and adapted talents to overcome and excel in such demanding circumstances. However, those talents did not emanate from a DNA code, but rather from an adaptive mind geared for joy and freedom! The talent of leadership and self-perseverance is a choice, no different than the choice to become a neurosurgeon or a carpenter or a laborer. It all comes down to your passions, goals, and the choice to let go of envy for those who have already paid the price for their successes and talents.

Unfortunately, individuals can get caught in the envy trap. Where one individual chooses to rise to the challenges of their lives and circumstances, others choose not to look

within themselves for the answers. Rather, they stare down those who rise above the norm and cry "Foul; no fair!" They look at success and say, "But you are talented and I could never do that!" instead of finding strength within themselves to try and then keep on trying.

Let's put this straight: talents are not a characteristic you were born with, they are a result of multiple factors such as genetics, experiences, influences, body type, emotional upbringing, the lessons learned and not learned, and most importantly, what each individual decides they are willing to do with all that knowledge and all of those attributes while in the pursuit of their dreams. The beginning of all talent lies in the foundation of passion; in what you love!

If you choose to envy those who have obtained success, you have determined that you are not willing to look at your own life and potential. You have decided that it will make you happier to be envious than to live your dreams and become talented in your area of passion, whatever that may be. Of course dreaming comes with risk, and with risk comes the possibility of pain. But remember that with envy, pain is immediate and inevitable.

As you move forward with the following lessons our hope is that you will let go of any envy you may have towards those who have created and nurtured their talents. Only then can you clear away such distractions and focus on what you can do to work on the activities that you're passionate about, and that you are willing to complete. Then you can build your talents. The steps listed in the previous chapter describe the path to building and achieving goals. It is the process that, in the final analysis, will result in creating your talents. Should you choose the self-limiting thoughts that keep the spring of life on the negative side of things, then you are unlikely to develop new talents, or even to capitalize on those you've already created. But if you stretch the spring, by replacing envy with a focus on internal passion and potential, you will develop strengths you never knew were possible. This is the time to stretch the spring of life.

In summary, you will now take your Happiness Lists and expand them beyond any previous limitations. Then you will rate the Happiness List items by their potential to fulfill your passions. With passion and then active immersion as the foundation of a clearly defined goal, no obstacle can divert you from inevitable success.

The result of completing these goals will be the emergence of your newly created talents. You will go from generalized happiness lists to a self-actualized lifestyle filled with passion and newly formed talents.

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## CHAPTER 33

# Goal Setting

*“Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated, thus, everyone’s task is unique as his specific opportunity.”*

– Dr. Viktor Frankl, Austrian Neurologist and Psychiatrist, (1905 – 1997)

***A goal is a detailed plan of action that you can take to get from your current state to your desired state.***

Now that you’ve shattered your self-imposed limits and created happiness lists based on your passions, it’s time to turn those items into goals. There are three elements to a proper goal:

1. A specific endpoint.
2. Specific plans of how to reach the endpoint.
3. A specific timeline of when you’ll carry out and complete your plans.

The word to keep in mind is specific, specific, specific! The more specific you are about where you’re going, how you are going to get there, and when you’re going to take each step, the more likely you are to hit your target. Research also shows that specific challenging goals will lead to higher personal performance, even if the exact target isn’t reached. (Locke & Latham, 1984; Locke, 2013) Those who have a specific challenging goal do better than those with vague goals such as “I’ll do my best.” Most importantly, your vivid image of each goal will create a deep well of motivation to dip into when times are tough. Let’s consider an analogy.

Imagine that you are on a ship with a clear destination. You know the course to follow and you know there will

be safety and prosperity in the harbor. But storms, tides, and powerful currents are a factor during your trip. You have been at sea for many months and you are looking forward to receiving payment for your cargo. Your preparations, instruments, and provisions all make it possible for you to get to the harbor a thousand miles away. You have a precise goal, the harbor, and you have a detailed plan that will take you there.

While out at sea a storm hits, but you are prepared; you keep your rudder pointed in the right direction and your course remains true. You are now 800 miles from safe harbor. You know this portion of the trip is fraught with dangerous currents, but your detailed plan helps you to stay on course. Then you encounter calm seas and pleasant weather. You have only 300 miles left to go. This good fortune lasts for just 100 miles, then without warning your rudder fails to respond. Now, without the rudder, your ship is blown about aimlessly, but once again, you are prepared. Like all good captains do, you foresaw the potential danger of equipment failure and stocked the ship prior to leaving port with all the necessary tools and parts to make repairs. Thanks to your careful planning and dedication the ship is fixed and once again you are back underway.

Your last 200 miles go by flawlessly and you finally reach your destination. You were able to overcome each day’s trials because you were able to see beyond them. Passion for your goal was the force behind your success. Not only did you get to your destination, but your passion for the

goal got you through each challenge with confidence and poise. Your vision remained clear, even when the path was not.

Many times the long road to a worthy goal is improperly lit and bumps in the road can be hidden and troublesome. That is why the endpoint in the road must remain lit in your mind. You must envision the end as if it were right in front of you. This will create the light that is vital. Often your resources can be stretched to the limit, poor circumstances, misfortune, and temporary setbacks cannot stop a human spirit driven by commitment to a dream. As an old priest used to say, "Pray and move your feet! God isn't going to do it for you. He is waiting for you to do it for Him!"

Notice in this example, that the destination was never compromised. The captain's thoughts never wavered. He knew where he was going and how he planned to get there. Without a clearly defined destination, he wouldn't be immersed; his drive would dissipate and give way to reactive choices. There would have been no reason to keep the rudder steady. Had the rudder wavered, the ship would not have stayed the course. People's lives are no different. With no destination, no new self-images to focus on, there is no direction. This is precisely why so many people avoid writing down goals or a new set of self-images, because then they become responsible for the work necessary to achieve them. Individuals who fail to write down clearly defined goals will be tossed around by life's circumstances. They will remain a victim of life's inherent randomness and apparent cruelty.

Without written goals each passing day can be purposeless. Those existing in a life with no destination or goals usually end up in places they do not want to be. They are the perpetual victims. You will hear many people in this position lamenting about their misfortune, and how badly they are treated by the world and the people in it. These are the people who continue to compound one poor decision with another, move from one unhappy relationship to another, one unfulfilling job to another, or one serious health problem to another. Often their reactions to their apparent hard luck become just as chaotic as the situations in which they find themselves, making matters even worse. It is important to remember that bad things consistently happen to people who fail to plan for good things.

Case in point: many heavy substance users complain that life has treated them poorly, yet most have brought that negativity into their lives through their own choices and actions. When life is left to random chance and expectations are set to the negative, there is a very high probability that bad things will happen. Without a well-defined, detailed plan for the future, people cannot know

where they are going. They have no plan beyond getting their next high or drunk. Their momentary choices are guided by whim rather than purpose. Because they did not believe in the future, their future is lost to them. In fact, what they are truly doing is avoiding the maturing process. They are not taking responsibility for their lives, which would require making a decision to stop destructive behaviors. They fail to draw a line, to take control of their lives, to analyze the outcome of poor choices and actions, and to write down new and better options. Once an option is written it begins to have power.

Goals empower people to become exactly who and what they want to become. This is why you spent time writing down and analyzing who you want to become in your new self-images. *A specific goal worked at with persistence and commitment will always lead to greater personal achievement and satisfaction.* The readings and exercises in Life Movements are designed to help you formulate goals that you can become motivated and committed to complete. The ingredients to such goals are specificity, challenge, and passion. Now it is time to focus on bringing greater specificity and challenge to your goals.

## Specificity and Challenge

Research definitively shows that there are two key ingredients of goals that consistently produce greater levels of personal achievement: specificity and challenge level. (Locke & Latham, 1984; Locke, 2013) We're now going to show you where you can add these elements to the goals you're creating from your happiness lists. As you convert those items into full goals, you can be more specific about exactly *what* you want; *how* you will make it a reality; and *when* you will achieve it.

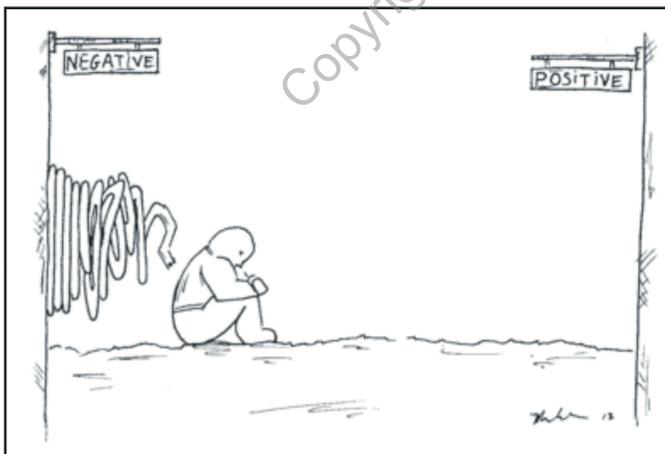
Because of the open-ended nature of the Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation, each individual has their own unique view of what makes them happy, fulfilled and passionate. As a practical matter we provided you with a grouping of categories in which to classify your happiness list items. These categories (i.e., material, relationship, spiritual, etc.) allow for a whole host of activities or items that could make you a more fulfilled person. These classifications were provided to facilitate thought and introspection. Without them, we have seen people struggle to write down even the most rudimentary items that could make them more satisfied. Hopefully, with the help of these categories, you have written a good set of lists that are now categorized by their passion potential.

For the purposes of developing your personal goals list you will now concentrate strictly on the top ten

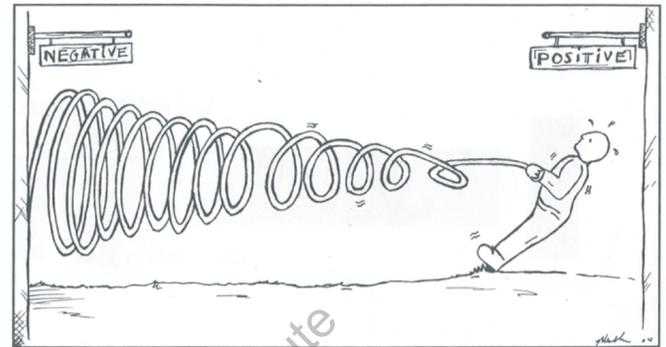
prioritized Happiness List items first. The Happiness List items numbered eleven on down will be reevaluated later to become the next goals to be formed as some of the original ten are achieved or discarded.

First, let's add some specificity and challenge in the most direct way by making the happiness items more specific and thus more challenging. You may have written something very vague on your list like "I want my own home." To be more specific you can ask yourself a few questions. What kind of home; a rental apartment, a luxury apartment in a doorman building in SoHo; a mobile home, a condominium, or a 6000 square foot house in the country with an in-ground swimming pool and a few hundred acres of forest for horseback riding? What kind of home will it be and where will it be? Without answering these questions, you will not create a goal that truly motivates you. So, we will ask you to be as specific as possible with each happiness item if you haven't already done so. And remember, if the goal isn't challenging (meaning, it doesn't require much work to get from your current state to the endpoint of the goal), then it won't elicit much action, commitment, and change from you. You can consider this too as you make your happiness items more specific. This should've been addressed to a certain degree in the creation of the Happiness Lists, but some people still make it to this point without really dreaming.

Remember, in this process, you're trying to stretch the spring of life. Goals that are not challenging, and do not require you to leave your comfort zone do nothing to stretch the spring of life. Consequently, in the Known Risk Stage:



Do you want to push outside your comfort zone, or stick with what's easy? Now is the time to decide if you want to stretch the spring with challenging goals and enter the Improvement Stage:



We don't wish to encourage you to set goals that you believe are impossible, because if that's what you believe, then they won't motivate you to stretch the spring. However, your goals should be sufficiently challenging in order to create lasting change in your life, if that is what you seek. If a goal seems impossible from your current perspective, such as, "I could never own a big luxurious house in the country", but you still want it, and think that pessimism may be the real obstacle, then shove your easier option thinking aside and write down that big goal. *Aim for greater happiness.* Maybe you have no savings at all; maybe you feel stuck in a low paying dead end job, and you can't envision with all your current responsibilities that you could ever achieve such a lofty goal; yet, you still have the passion for it. For now, throw your fear aside and dream big. Later on, you will learn how you can have that dream, and sustain the motivation to achieve it with sub-goals.

## Timelines

Each of these top ten Happiness List items/activities you have now listed and made more specific may naturally seem to fit into classic long-term or short-term goal classifications. But, unlike goals courses you may have attempted in the past where items are placed into those two sterile classifications, we will not separate them in this manner. Rather, all your Happiness List items that are going to be converted into goals are going to be classified simply as goals. There is a reason for this simple classification.

All people live in the present. Let us repeat that: *all people live in the present.* This is completely unavoidable. You might think about the past or the future, but you are

always living in the present moment. A life is simply a succession of present moments that quickly morph into past moments through the passing of time. That is the very nature of time. Because of this unchangeable and universal fact, each and every Happiness List item that you convert into a goal is constantly being squeezed into certain spaces in your personal present timeline each day that you are alive. And, because you are always living in this unchangeable series of present moments, it is more fulfilling to make each present moment a deeply satisfying one, rather than focusing solely on when a goal will be completed down the road.

For example, it is much more gratifying to enjoy each day working hard to earn the money needed for a new car versus focusing on not having a car the entire time that you are making the money to get one. People tend to feel lack whenever they spend their time looking down the road too much at an eventual plan that might pan out in the future, rather than enjoying the present circumstances they are creating for themselves. Always remember that the brain is a single processor; either you can enjoy thinking about the present and what your present circumstances are or you can shift your thoughts towards thinking predominantly about the future (or to the past for that matter). Which do you feel would be most productive?

You can take heart in knowing that there is a place for thinking about the future and making future deadlines for achieving goals. We have spent quite a bit of time throughout this course looking at the future and examining the past as well. So you can see that planning for the future is important and these thoughts have real positive value. Timelines are a key element in transforming Happiness List items into goals. They are a simple way to add specificity and challenge to your goals. But the main point here is this: you might want to avoid making the thoughts of tomorrow the sole focus of your attention when thinking specifically about your goals. Make sure that your present circumstances can be enjoyed to the fullest while in the process of working to achieve your goals is just as important as planning for the future and focusing on that particular aspect of living.

In the workbook lessons for this chapter, you will make a practical timeline and a deadline for each of your ten highest ranked Happiness list items, thus adding another level of specificity to convert them into a workable Goals List. Deadlines are the yardstick used to measure how successful people are at sticking to their goals. Put another way, it is a tool for you to use to make sure you are getting things done and remain on course each day. If you pass a deadline, you may simply need to step up your game and/or reevaluate the passion you think you have for that particular goal.

Undeniably, however, any goal worth completing is necessarily based on present moments of action that eventually define the completion of your goal. So while each goal will have a timeline to complete it, we encourage living life to its fullest in the present. If you do, and you are following your passions each moment, then the deadlines and timelines you set for each goal will be fulfilled quite naturally with little thought given to the deadline itself. That is the beauty and exciting nature of passion, it naturally drives success and builds talents!

This concentration on the present moment and living your dreams in real time make it impossible to fall into the common trap of thinking that “I will be happy when ...” To focus solely on the end-game is to miss the present. Then you would miss the entire point of living. *Living happens in the present*, not somewhere in the future. Waiting for future bliss guarantees a loss of it in the present. Remember, we are not saying to abandon planning and future dreaming. Rather, we are advocating that you plan and then enjoy the trip as you fulfill your plan!

Invariably you will find at some point in the future that you have not met a self-imposed deadline on a certain goal. It is then that you will understand the value of a written deadline. That deadline is a self-imposed line in the sand that demarcates the completion of your goal. And should you not complete the goal in the allotted time, a reevaluation of what you are spending your time doing each day on that particular goal will be natural. Do you need to change the goal? Do you find that your passion is not in that activity as first thought? Have your interests changed? Have you been lazy? Do you need to make lifestyle changes? There are many questions you can ask yourself in this situation. However, without a deadline, these questions might never occur.

Flying blind without self-imposed deadlines allows for a person to remain in a comfort zone that could end with a lower quality of life. At the same time, it's important to realize that if deadlines are set too far in the future then they may not bring much purpose or urgency to your daily activities. Conversely, if they're all set for tomorrow, then either your goal activities aren't challenging enough, or you'll be met with immediate disappointment because you haven't given yourself enough time to work on them. As you set deadlines, try to strike a happy medium where they retain some level of challenge without becoming so overwhelming that you decide to quit pursuing them.

It is also important to remember that your Happiness Lists will change over time and will need to be updated occasionally. Your dreams and aspirations will change and consequently, so too will your goals. It is always a work in progress, an exciting evolution of discoveries and self-created passion and talent. People should always

be reinventing themselves, allowing for an open mind to greater pursuits, to increased self-worth and value to others. What a wonderful thing it is to bring goodness and happiness to those you love and work with everyday. To feel the bliss of love, compassion, drive, accomplishment, energy and vitality is to live life to the fullest.

So, as you can see, deadlines have real value. But beyond the measurement value associated with deadlines, we suggest an intense focus on today and the pieces of your goals that can be accomplished right now. This is, after all, the only way any goal gets completed.

All goals, whether they take five minutes or five years end up being accomplished through a succession of present moments. Because of the natural tendency to look at each day as a workable chunk of present moments, each goal can be worked on daily. You can ask yourself these questions. What can I do today to be happier? What can I complete to further my goals? What can I do to be a light to others? Ultimately, the most important lesson here is this: knowing what actions you must take each day to achieve your goals, while focusing on ways you can make that piece of the eventual puzzle as gratifying and blissful as possible. By doing this, you will eventually stop the habit of looking down the road with worry and anxiety and replace your thoughts with organized goal driven daily actions.

## From Dreams to Goal-Directed Action

If you've approached the Life Movements process sincerely, then you have already done several things that are actively stretching the spring of life to the positive side. For example, here's what you have done in the last few exercises:

- In your initial happiness lists, you replaced a focus on problems with a focus on happier options.
- In your revised happiness lists, you replaced a focus on personal limits with a focus on personal passions.

And now, you're taking one of your biggest steps yet bringing greater goal-directedness into your life. You've been making your goals more specific and challenging, and now you're going to make them workable. Remember, goals include a *plan of action* you can take to get from your current state to your desired state. This is where your dreams become practical; when you pair them with a plan of action that allows you to make them a reality.

Now you are going to take your top 10 happiness items and develop a plan of action on how to achieve each of them. It's the same as mapping a set of driving directions. You start with where you are, pick a destination, and then determine the path to get there, with each turn along the way clearly defined. Of course, some goals are extremely complex, and the exact path may be unclear. There may be obstacles of which you are currently unaware and you may hit a detour along your route. We don't expect you to anticipate every one of these detours, nor do we suggest you hold yourself to a standard of knowing all. But we do ask that to the best of your ability, you write out the most detailed list of steps possible that you think are necessary to complete each of the goals on your top 10 list.

You may need to do some research in order to carry out this part of the goal setting process. You may want to do some reading on how to achieve certain goals, do online research, or even talk to someone who has already achieved the same goals that you want to pursue. Do whatever is within your power to come up with a specific plan of action for each happiness item. Going back to the example of wanting a home, you may have decided on a specific type of home in a specific place. Now you will add the actions you'll need to achieve it (i.e. your method), and a timeline for your work.

**Goal:** A new four bedroom home in southern Vermont with a mountain view, a pool, and in close proximity to a ski mountain, so that I can be active with my kids and live in an environment that I find uplifting.

### Method:

1. Price out some homes near my top 3 ski areas (Mt Snow, Stratton, Okemo). I'll do this throughout the next few months on the weekends.
2. Make my job remote so I can move to Vermont and work from my home. I'll need to talk with my boss about this. I'm going to have this talk with him in 6 months as I streamline the sales process in my office.
3. Save another \$20,000 for a down payment. I have some savings, but I know I'll need a little more money. We'll skip the annual February vacation to Colorado this year, and that'll save us over \$6,000. It'll be a good opportunity to teach the kids about pursuing greater goals. I'm also going to push for bigger sales to increase my commissions. I've plateaued at \$450,000 in sales a month, but I know I can break the \$500,000 mark with a few tweaks to the process. I want to save the \$20,000 by the time I have the conversation with my boss in May.
4. Make a decision, put my current house on the market, close on a new home, and make the move. I'll work on this between May and November.

Deadline: next November

Depending on your perspective, this can be a very ambitious goal. Maybe it won't all work out the way you planned, but it has all the marks of a real goal. It's extremely specific in the what, how, and when. It's got a clear destination, method of achievement, and timelines for the various steps as well as a deadline for the fully completed goal. It brings purpose to the goal-setter's daily actions, and gives him benchmarks along the way to know what he needs to do, and how to measure whether he's making progress. Your work for this part of Life Movements will be to set goals for each of your top 10 Happiness List Items in the same way.

## Sub-Goals

You may look at the goal above and think, 'That's exactly what I want, but I'm nowhere near achieving it like that guy. He's already got a home, but my wife is pregnant with our first child now; we're living with her parents, and I've got very little credit. And I've got a salaried job that won't allow me to make more money. I don't know when we'll be able to buy a house, never mind a dream house like that.' Be careful, staying on this negative side with the crushed spring of life means that you're situation won't change much, unless circumstances coincidentally change to your benefit. Life Movements is about taking control.

So, maybe it's not realistic for you to set a goal like the previous example. This is where sub-goals can be helpful. They allow you to retain the dream goal, while giving you reachable goals along the way. Sub-goals look exactly like some of the action steps you'd take on the way to a dream goal, and in fact that's exactly what they are, except for one important difference; they're smaller versions of the dream goal. So for example, you might have the exact dream home happiness item listed above, but it's just so far out of reach for you now that you find it hard to commit to it. You may think it's at least 10 years away if it's possible at all. That's ok. List it as usual in the goal setting format above:

**Goal:** A new four bedroom home in southern Vermont with a mountain view, a pool, and in close proximity to a ski mountain, so that I can be active with my kids and live in an environment that I find uplifting.

### Method:

1. Start putting some money aside. My wife and I have been spending money without care and have no savings. We'll track our expenses, and see where we can eliminate some spending. I'll need at least

\$100,000 down payment for a home like that, and nearly double the income I have now. We'll work on strict budgeting over the next 6 months to create some new spending and saving habits.

2.Sub-Goal: a starter home. I want the dream house, but I also want to be a homeowner now. There are a lot of foreclosed homes in the area that I could pick up for next to nothing. We could move in and fix the house into something I'd be proud to live in, and we could eventually resell at a profit. I'm really going to get serious about this and make it happen within the next year. My brother has done this with his family, so I'll ask him for some direction.

3.Sub-Goal: Earn more money. I must examine my career situation and see if there is a room for advancement where I am now. If there is, I will meet with my supervisor or Human Resources to find out what I must do to achieve a promotion. If there is no room for advancement I will begin seeking a new job; or examine my career overall. Perhaps I can take night classes and seek opportunities with greater earning potential.

4.Etc.

## Deadline for Main (Dream) Goal: 6 years.

Notice the dream wasn't sacrificed to negativity and circumstantial living. The deadline was set farther out into the future, and sub-goals were created that fulfill the more basic dream of being a homeowner and improving his financial situation. These serve as a stepping stones to the ultimate dream goal. This can be done with all sorts of dreams. Perhaps you want a career as an action movie star. This takes a lot of work, dedication, and perseverance and even then, it's a long shot. But does being a successful working actor excite you? If so, keep that big dream, and set sub-goals to keep you motivated along the way. Being cast in a large stage production, getting your first commercial acting gig, and your first speaking role in a television drama can all be highly motivating sub-goals along the way. Sub-goals allow you to satisfy your desire to be realistic while refusing to revise your dreams downward.

Remember that this chapter is about creating the best for you and those around you! Put simply, you can only do this with a drive to live each moment to its fullest, and a belief in the eventual achievement of your dreams. So please, set these goals fearlessly, and keep in mind this still won't be your completed plan. You will be doing more work on your goals in the next two chapters.

In the next chapter you will work on the happiness list items that are more cognitive in nature; the ones related almost purely to thoughts and emotions. For now, you're going to work on the goals that are action oriented. Get to it and carry out the following steps in the space provided in your workbook:

1. Pick a top 10 list of happiness items.
2. Make those items as specific as possible.
3. Write out your methods for achieving each goal, as well as adding sub-goals if necessary.
4. Add detailed timelines and deadlines to each goal.

Each converted happiness item should follow this format:

**Goal:** *Write exactly what you want and intend to achieve.*

**Method:**

1. What you will do to achieve it.
2. The next thing you'll do to achieve it.
3. And so on. Don't forget to add timelines to each step.
4. Add sub-goals in this section if you feel they are necessary.

Deadline: when do you plan to complete the goal?

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## CHAPTER 34

## Self-Directed Change

*“I have noticed even people who claim everything is predestined, and that we can do nothing to change it, look before they cross the road.”*

– Stephen Hawking, English theoretical physicist, (b. 1942)

As you take your focus away from the problems of low-satisfaction choices, and redirect it toward the creation of happier options and a better future, you are stretching the spring of life to a state that will support proactive living rather than reactive living. The importance of this can't be overlooked, because as you know **change is constant**.

The point of this axiom is to become aware that change is always happening, whether you intend it or not. And just like our ship analogy in the last chapter, if you don't decide how you want to change, you may not end up happy with the changes that do occur in your life. So, embracing the axiom and using it to your benefit means becoming proactive about changing your life.

Long-term vision is crucial to building a sense of purpose and lasting motivation. However, life is lived in the present; that is, you're always choosing to do something right now, and dealing with your immediate desires and concerns. The key to building a workable set of goals is in the choice to balance long-term vision with daily living. You've been working on that with your more concrete actionable goals in the last chapter, but now it's time to learn how to work on those goals that are more abstract; the emotional and other thought-based goals.

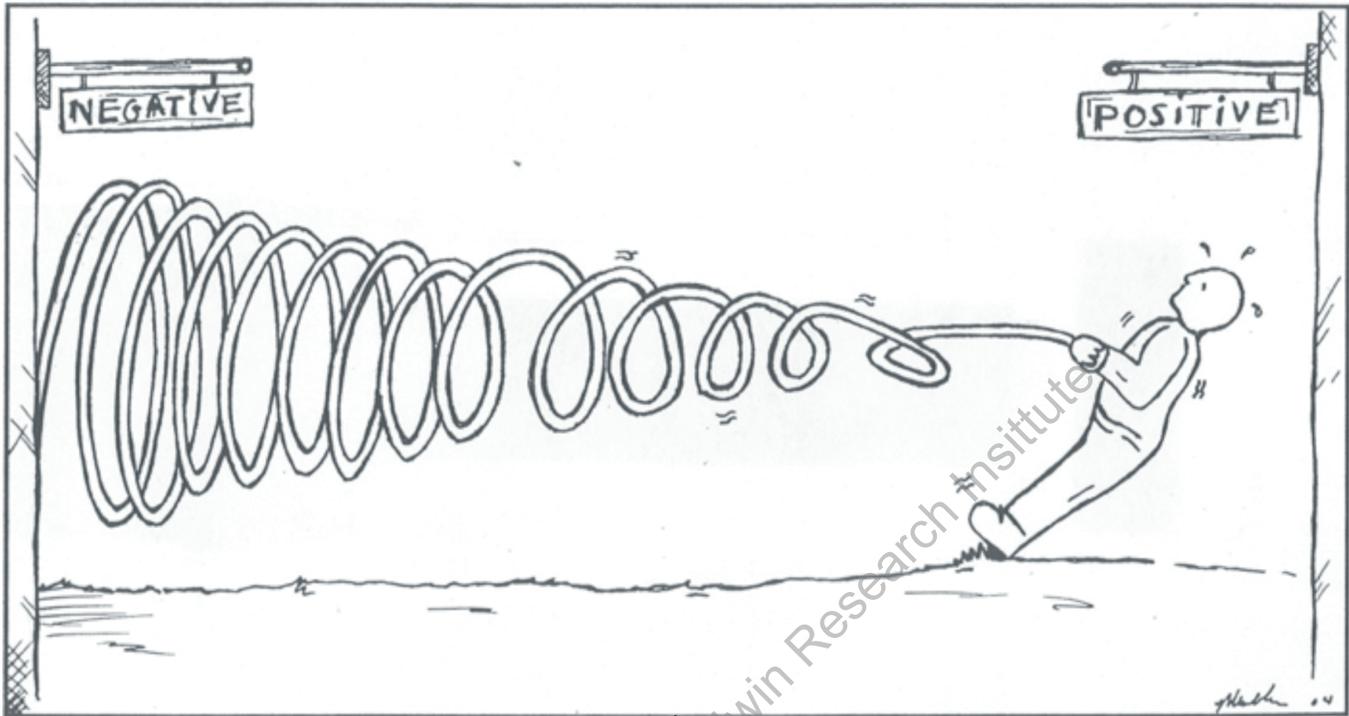
The path to real self-directed change must begin with your thoughts. Even if you have no emotional goals, you at least must believe in yourself in order to pursue any other goals you may have set. So, this section is relevant to all of our guests in some way. Everyone knows that

thoughts are the engine that drives the train of human circumstance. Your thoughts pull the cars and caboose of both action and habit with commanding force. Therefore, it makes sense that you be deliberate in creating goals that promote the most productive habits of thought so that you'll experience full conscious power over your daily actions as your new norm.

When you created your new self-images and top10 happiness list, you probably envisioned some emotional and thought-based changes and happiness items. It's not uncommon for people to say things like “I want to be happy most of the time, even when things are going wrong”; “I want to feel more confident and capable of dealing with problems”; “I don't want to feel so depressed and fatalistic all the time”; “I want to have better relationships with the people in my life”; “I want to regain trust, build a solid reputation, and be seen in a positive light.”

All of these goals contain a large cognitive component, and some of them are purely based on your thought habits. Most people think that these kinds of goals *just happen* and can't be self-directed. Such conclusions are based on ignorance of the workings of emotions. Anything that is feelings-based flows from your thoughts. Since you have the power to choose your thoughts, then you have the power to create improved mood states and proactively pursue emotional and other thought-based goals. It's actually quite simple, but it takes work. In short, if you want to feel differently, you must first think differently.

This is yet another instance of improving your life by stretching the spring:



It will require a tremendous amount of practice to make these thought processes a natural part of your life, so we suggest you begin practicing thinking differently right now. This creates the positive self-directed neuroplastic changes in the brain that can then help you to fulfill your new self-images. Having a more positive mindset will power your commitment to higher goals, and higher goals will result in a more positive mindset. (Dweck, 2012) It works both ways and creates a positive cycle, as opposed to the vicious cycle of low expectations and fearful choices.

Keep in mind Hebb's Law, *neurons that fire together wire together*. You now understand that the more a thought is repeated, the easier it becomes to process that thought efficiently. Hebb's Law has practical, applied significance. If you feel consistently unhappy and you are focused on what you lack or what upsets you, and you have pessimistic outlooks of the future as well as cynical judgments of the present; this can only be because you have practiced these unhappy thoughts in a consistent, repetitious manner first. Why would this process be any different for those who are, or decide, to be chronically happy? It's actually quite simple; if you practice happier thoughts, you will become happier.

This is a natural product of the principles of self-directed neuroplasticity. The freely chosen thoughts of the mind create changes in the physical hardware known as the brain, which then facilitate more of the same by rewiring a specialized network of neurons to carry out such thoughts in repetition.

## Self-Directed Neuroplasticity

It's important to remember that the neuroplastic process is always at work in every human being, whether or not they are aware of it. You are always experiencing neuroplastic change of some kind. *You are what you think*. However, with your new awareness of the process, you may decide to be proactive about choosing the exact direction of your change. You may *mindfully choose to initiate neuroplastic change in a positive direction* rather than mindlessly adhering to your old habits of thought that have gotten you into the downward emotional spiral you may be facing now. The choice is yours. This is a practical way to stretch the spring of life with the goal of creating a new mental set-point for yourself.

To make lasting changes in your thought patterns toward a happier direction, it is helpful to build a Thought Process Chart. The Thought Process Chart is made up of two simple columns. In the first column you will list all of your self-limiting thoughts (for lack of a better term we will call these negative thoughts) that might have characterized your previous self-images. The second column will contain a list of positive or self-expansive thoughts that could characterize your new self-images.

We suggest creating your chart in this manner with the assumption that your new self-images will be positive when compared to your old manner of living. This, of course, may not be the case. You might decide to remain the same. If so, write that. There is no judgment here, you are simply practicing self-analysis and taking full responsibility for your thoughts, and thus your actions in the present and future. (Of course we always hope for our guests to desire positive change; whatever that may be. So, from this point forward we are going to continue with the assumption that you are making more self-expansive changes to your thoughts and lifestyle, and that your new self-images reflect that self-improvement desire and goal.)

Below is an example of what a typical Thought Process Chart might contain. We don't mean to imply that any of the thoughts listed should or should not be yours. The purpose is simply to give you a general idea of what items might be written in a typical list to get your ideas flowing.

Negative Thoughts	Positive Thoughts
Unmotivated	Motivated
Unforgiving	Forgiving
Bitter	Happy
Pessimistic	Optimistic
Desperate	Calm
Unfulfilled	Fulfilled
Sad	Joyous
Self-Consumed	Giving
Dishonest	Honest
Unloving	Loving
Intolerant	Tolerant
Etc.	Etc.

The two columns illustrate the two extremes of an individual's thinking patterns. On the left side are the limiting, myopic thoughts that characterized some of the negative sides to the individual's previous self-images. On the right are the option-filled, self-expansive thoughts that characterize this same individual's new, more positive self-images.

Take some time now and build your own version of a Thought Process Chart by looking at your emotional goals and replacing each negative pattern from your old self-image and past that you want to change with its positive opposite thought. Also, look through your happiness list items for things that are purely thought-based. Many of those can be turned directly into goals by placing them on your thought process chart. Since the most fundamental choice is to either think one thought or another, such goals are not complex, and don't take multiple steps. They simply take daily practice, through the direct choice to think these thoughts more often. Make your chart now:

Negative Thoughts	Positive Thoughts

Remember, you don't create new thoughts by focusing on old ones. You create them by replacing the old ones. Begin to change your thought patterns so they exhibit the qualities listed in the right column of your chart. If you want to make progress towards achieving your new self-images in a timely manner and have those changes become a working part of yourself, then begin practicing those thoughts listed in the right column to the extreme for a period of time. For example, if you decide to be more compassionate, you might try to be compassionate to a level that exceeds your normal comfort zone. Really work at it! This is how self-directed neuroplastic changes are facilitated.

Much like growing muscle tissue, it takes a certain amount of initial discomfort for the exercise to have a lasting result. You would have to work hard to have a muscular, chiseled body and you will need to work hard mentally to become a more fulfilled individual. Thought habits follow the same logic as does building toned muscles. For example, it takes consistent mindful effort to make a normally unkind individual a compassionate individual. This commitment to change is created through working the right-hand column thoughts, not just saying you are going to do so.

In reality, living life according to the values in the right-hand column in and of itself is considered normal. However, it might not seem that way to you now because you have lived with your thought habits counter to some or maybe all of these for many years. The truth is that the vast majority of people who lead happy and successful lives exhibit positive thought habits every day, regardless of their personal circumstances. They enjoy the benefits of living according to the axioms by receiving positive results. They think in positive terms, simple as that.

We encourage you to practice all of the thoughts set forth in the right-hand column of your own chart. For example, if you listed kindness there, then practicing kindness to the extreme should be a daily exercise for you now so that kindness can become your neuroplastic norm. Why not? It can't hurt. This is the point in the process at which those who are truly successful and those who remain unsuccessful (or unhappy) tend to part ways. This is the point at which people willing to make changes rise above those stuck in mediocrity, immaturity, and underdevelopment. This is the point in the program at which you can put forth a tangible effort to change and experience great results.

## Application

Your goal here is to build a more developed, mature self-image, which might include kindness, forgiveness,

and a genuine interest in others (if you listed these in your right hand column list). Without a dedicated effort to change, everything you have written down and spent time contemplating will fail to improve your life. Your self-analysis served to identify what you chose to change about your thinking but not how to achieve those changes. That part begins with the Thought Process Chart and applying the right-hand column into your daily routines. Writing, in and of itself, does not change you very much; it creates new awareness of what to change. Change requires that you actually do something different and that, of course, begins with the choice to think differently.

## Success

We define success as achieving your new self-image, whatever you have decided that will be. Success is practicing the thought patterns on the right side of the chart because ultimately that is what brings people lasting happiness and continued success. If you want the most out of life, become willing to forgive all those who have hurt you and practice the new thoughts and values proposed in the chart.

You might reasonably ask, "Why must I live the extreme right of the chart if everyone else who lives a normal life behaves in a more moderate or balanced approach? I want success, but I do not want to be held to such high standards."

First, the standards represented in the right hand column of the chart are not unrealistic or uncommon in society. Just because there are people who dwell in the left hand column for their entire lives is no reason for you to assume most do. They don't. Most people think and live within the parameters of the right column. Most people do not settle for the left-hand column thought patterns. The fact is most people live relatively mature, stable and happy lives. And while you may believe this approach of working the Thought Process Chart items to the extreme is over the top, this technique is practiced by the vast majority of people worldwide everyday as a matter of course. It is the everyday habit of millions who are constantly bettering themselves and those around them.

## The Law of Attraction

The law of attraction states, "People move their lives in the direction of their current and most dominant thoughts and attract those who are likeminded." So, in effect, you attract people and situations that mirror your personal thoughts. Thus, you attract the negative

when you are negative and the positive when you are positive. It is not surprising that most unhappy people attract those in the same boat. You can simply stop by a bar at 2 am if you want to see the law of attraction at work in a negative sense.

People have a tendency to believe the rest of the world thinks and does as they do. For example, if you are dishonest, you will have a tendency to believe that others are as well; breeding a feeling of personal paranoia. This is especially true with substance users. That lifestyle attracts like-minded negative people. It is not surprising that the same individuals that are reluctant to practice positive thoughts to the extreme for a period of time also view the world as a negative place.

We hope at this point in this process that you have opened your mind, broadened your perspective, and decided to strive for something better. It is time to walk out of the shadows into a much bigger and brighter place. Options exist! Attract positivity in your mind first and then in your actions.

If an unfulfilled person is going to change and live life at the opposite end of the spectrum, he must work quite hard at this new goal, and this must begin with his daily thoughts. Let's say John wrote in the left-hand column that he had been a person who demanded attention from others, thought little about others and this caused him loneliness and strained relationships with others. Maybe he wrote "mean" as a simple description of these thoughts. As this is a portion of his past self-images, the right-hand column item that counters this self-destructive thought pattern would be to become a more compassionate person. So, the item in the left-hand side would say, "mean" and the right hand column would say, "compassionate."

In this particular case John might decide to strive to consider the needs of others and work at this for a significant period of time for positive neuroplastic changes to be built into his brain's structure. That is what is meant by extreme compassion. He would apply the thought process of compassion to the extreme until that neuroplastic network is built and readily supports his new behaviors. Once the network is built and the habit of compassionate thoughts becomes the norm, the effort to be compassionate is no longer so extreme. In a logical sense, through conscious attention to compassionate thoughts and actions, compassion becomes the norm, and thus there is no longer a need for extreme attention being devoted to it. (Begley, 2007)

The period of time this mental training will take is determined by how quickly you are willing to change and adapt to your new life. How truly motivated you are in your mission for positive change also plays a key role

in how quickly your brain tissue will support your new thought patterns. Emotions and motivation matter in the science of brain change. For some people this may take a few weeks of practice, while for others may take a few months or a few years. Everyone is different. Some are much more motivated to change than others. Our hope is that you are willing to change now, so your amended lifestyle becomes a consistent work in progress with ever-increasing joy as the result.

In the meantime, while your new network is being built, you will progress from the Improvement Stage where you're consciously and continuously working hard to be positive, to the Success Stage where you begin to feel the support of the spring. At that point you will have stretched the spring enough so that it now offers some resistance even if you occasionally push in the negative direction. Likewise, it begins to support more effortless movement in the positive direction, as you create a new mental set-point through self-directed neuroplasticity. Below is an analogy to demonstrate the daily practice that is required for you to make lasting change.

When a top contender in championship boxing is training for a fight, he usually prepares for three to eight months or longer. He will prepare his body and mind for the 12, 3 minute rounds he will have to endure in the fight. The actual fight time is 36 minutes of fierce, physical action. The average fighter will throw 50 – 65 punches per round, totaling several hundred punches in the fight.

Over the several-month training period, the fighter trains six to eight hours a day. He will go through massive physical exertion, restricted diets, weight lifting, running, mitt work, sparring, heavy bag work, speed bag work, medicine ball training, and double-end bag work as part of his regimen. It all adds up to tens of thousands of punches, hundreds of rounds of sparring, and a total lifestyle change. His livelihood and his life depend on his preparation. When the bell rings for round one, because of this training regimen, his actions are so ingrained in him, (so neuroplastically driven into the brain tissue) that they seem completely automatic. The neuronal pathways are burned in place. His mental capacity has been so well-trained that his action uses the subconscious and no longer requires conscience effort.

The boxer prepares by over-preparing. His body movements have been honed to their most efficient state because they must be for him to succeed. His adversary has trained equally hard and for every bout the boxer must be prepared for the fight of his life. To be mediocre in a boxing ring is career-ending and quite possibly, life threatening. Is your situation really any different?

Achieving full adult development and joy in a mature life is no different from training for a boxing match. Living and practicing positive thoughts and actions every single day will support whatever new self-image you have chosen. The key is to be over-prepared to deal with life in a way that you have never dealt with life before, hence the term extreme when describing the conscious effort needed to build positive thought patterns. A boxer does not enter the ring unfamiliar with the basics of training and technique. A person who wants to lead a happy life must learn the extremes of positive thought, forgiveness, action, service, and love, because all of these are the basic ingredients that produce joy when these thoughts become second nature.

Like the boxer who hones his skills to the point of instinct, a person desiring a successful life must display the same dedication. As a self-expansive and fulfilling lifestyle begins to become intuitive, you will be changing yourself rapidly. These rapid self-directed changes will be reflected in your everyday life. It will help you to rebuild trust with those you hurt and build new, much more positive relationships, in general. Your main goal is to achieve consistent joy, and these daily practices are a way you can achieve this.

Unfortunately, some of our guests tend to be impatient perfectionists who want the benefits of a successful, joy-filled life without having to do the work. They are impulsive and desire immediate perfection, and when they make a mistake, their all-or-nothing attitude provides the ideal excuse to quit trying.

This immaturity is self-defeating. If the process isn't easy and instantly satisfying, these people move on to the next most convenient option, i.e. whatever is easiest. That is why some people may still be attracted to other instantly gratifying activities such as gambling, short-term immediate gratification based relationships, drug-seeking behavior, affairs, gossip, attention seeking, and social drama, to name just a few. Those negative habits and activities divert the mind from the hard work of changing. We hope you work through this self-based avoidance and have the determination to force yourself into a more positive state of mind. Concentrate on your new self-image every time you feel yourself going for the quick fix. We can assure you, it is well worth your efforts to complete this process.

Occasionally, one of our guests will come out of the fog, write their axiom-based self-analysis, become shocked and frightened by what they've written and revert back to their quick fix mentality as a means putting off the changes that are necessary for success. Their past seems too troubling, so their habits of living life using the negative side of the chart continue to be an acceptable,

although self-limiting, option.

At this point in the process, a common occurrence is for the guest who is struggling, to engage in negative conversations criticizing family and friends. She convinces herself that her few weeks of sobriety have provided her with insights well beyond those of others who have been, for many years, successfully living their lives. Still other guests who are struggle decide that this program is just too fundamental for their superior intellect. They may use this as their excuse to quit, claiming they've "got it." While such people may readily agree that others might benefit from the message contained in this program, they are quick to point out that given their advanced intellect, they really don't need the level of detail it requires. Often these people turn their energies to debating our methods while justifying their negative attitude as "just playing the devil's advocate." While we do not discourage debate, we do want to point out that debating as a means to avoid change must be identified for what it is. Then there are those guests who spend hours trying to convert their family and friends to their way of thinking. If you find yourself going down any of these pathways, keep this in mind: true intelligence and hard work always shows in the results. The following illustrations depict why your life may have been so difficult and why living at the positive side of the chart can build a life of joy.

## Emotional Goals

By creating a thought process chart, you gave yourself a powerful tool to achieve your emotional goals. You developed a plan of action, albeit a very simple one: *replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts*. If you feel any of emotional happiness list items require more work than daily mindful attention and the creation of positive thoughts, then we welcome you to develop your own steps, just as you did with your more concrete goals in the last chapter. This is the essence of self-directed change; you choose the pursuits that you think will bring you greater happiness, make plans, and get to work. You create the change you want by giving yourself direction, instead of following whims and later regretting the change you mindlessly created.

As you map out the paths to achieving your goals, the dramatic self-change process you started with self-analysis continues. You then can begin carrying out your action steps, trying to achieve more difficult goals. You will literally be creating the future through your free will, intellect, emotions, mental power and physical actions. You will have begun to live with the natural axioms as your base principles and the right-hand column of the thought process chart as your mental standard of conduct. It takes responsibility and hard work to make this process an instinctive way of life but when you do, it will bring you

immense joy. You are growing in emotional and physical well-being and creating the resultant neuroplastic brain changes that will help support your new behaviors. All of these changes also provide renewal to a weary heart and soul. You will feel renewed, confident, successful and certainly less lonely.

However, sometimes people become discouraged along the way, and gravitate back towards negative options. They, in essence, push the already stretched spring back in the negative direction.

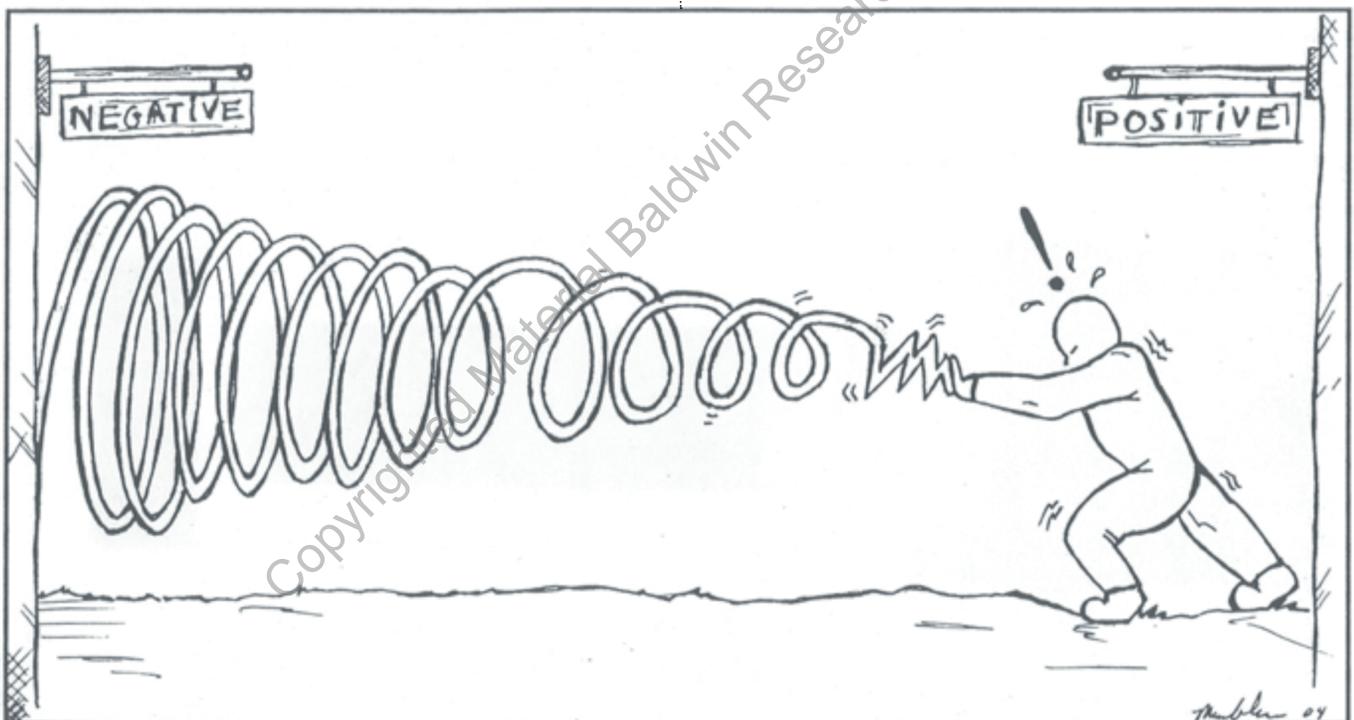
### Counterproductive Stage

If you once again use your efforts to push on the spring, as sometimes happens when you begin to feel uncomfortable or frightened, you will feel increased resistance because you will be pushing counter to the axioms. Here is an

others close to you are familiar with this pattern, you may lie to them, and you begin to feel that sense of emptiness that always results from making self-limiting choices.

Once you go down a path of maturity, development, and happiness, it becomes increasingly difficult and uncomfortable to push back the spring of life and return to your previous thoughts and habits. Wonderful feelings come with success. The farther you stretch the spring to the right, the more difficult it is to push it back in the other direction. Mature, option-based living, once learned and firmly established, is nearly impossible to forget and very difficult to abandon. This is especially true once you have created the supportive neuronal networks in the brain.

Choice and freewill certainly allow you to choose to live the same way you did before starting this program, but we sincerely hope you do not go down that path. It is much more satisfying to sit down to dinner with the rest of humanity than to take the shortcuts and survive on the scraps of brief happiness in the dark under the table.



example of this counterproductive process. If you made a strong start in the program, then you have written your axiom-based self-analysis and have begun to change your life through the goal-setting process, forgiveness, and are making true reparations to your family, friends, and co-workers. Then after all of this work, you make the decision, as you have so many times before in your life, to get involved in a relationship that is based on instant gratification and the habit of wanting attention. Because

When you change yourself for the better, you gain strength and move closer and closer to happiness and prosperity. Now that you've done the work of developing a thought process chart and action steps, you will do an exercise in the next chapter to streamline your goals list, so that you can focus your efforts of change in the most fulfilling direction.

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## CHAPTER 35

# Immersion in Goals

*“Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.”*

– T.S. Eliot, Poet and playwright (1888 – 1965)

Having personal goals is essential to achieving personal happiness. But without commitment, the most perfectly planned set of goals is completely useless. This chapter will explore the topic of immersion potential and will help you identify the goals that you will be most committed to pursuing. And it will help you to create a focused plan for personal change.

But first, let's take a step back for a moment. The concepts behind the five axioms, (like the concept of goal setting) are fairly simple and are understandable to all. Look at them again:

- 1. Change is constant.**
- 2. You are what you think.**
- 3. Happiness is the only cognitive motivator in the human condition.**
- 4. There is no shortcut to sustainable, stable, long-term happiness.**
- 5. Your happiness is in your own hands.**

Each of the Five Axioms is naturally intuitive. In other words, they simply make sense regardless of age, culture or background. They remain constant and true, thus understandable by anyone with an open mind. Work is required for each principle to have maximum potential. Of course, not everyone is willing to accept the responsibility to create their own happiness, but that does

not eliminate the axioms' natural simplicity and inherent wisdom. In other words, you must mindfully apply the axiom for the principle behind it to affect the greatest amount of positive change in your life.

The regrettable decision of laying aside responsibility for one's happiness in exchange for waiting on the leaders, experts, and professionals to do it for them has deep, painful and sometimes fatal consequences. As people search for an easier path to happiness, they must also be willing to pay the price levied on them by their new expert ruler. They become a subject of the treatment system, mental health system, or even the self-help industry, always wondering why they continue to feel unmotivated, lonely and unhappy.

Much like the axioms which have been buried in a sea of misinformation and complexity, goal setting seems to have followed that same unfortunate fate. Just look at the burgeoning industry of sober escorts, life coaches, therapists, and self-help 12-step style meetings that did not exist a mere seventy-five years ago. All of these external "experts" are supposedly needed to guide people to brighter futures, to teach them how to "stay on the wagon" or how to "remain focused on their goals." Yet, with all their help the happiness rate in America has been steadily declining for the same period of time. (Seligman, 2002)

Maybe the key to setting and attaining goals is more intuitive than you might think. Perhaps you have been

taught that humans are faulty and weak and in need of support to attain their goals, when, in fact, nothing could be farther from the truth. Maybe you have attempted several methods of setting goals, and you have failed and felt bad about it, or you cannot seem to sustain motivation in the pursuit of your goals.

Let us say this clearly: your struggles have not been because you did not have the proper support or the right expert guiding you. Rather, you were simply missing knowledge about the foundation of goal setting that creates a scenario in which sustainable motivation becomes a natural reality.

First, it's important that you choose goals that you care about. Don't let shame or cultural norms stand in the way. Such notions lead people to say, "Oh I don't really need anything; I have everything I want in life already." With such thoughts, personal progress and growth come to a standstill. You might also let social norms choose your goals for you, thinking that you *should be* this or that, want this certain good goal, and not want that *bad* goal. If you're serious about making a plan you can achieve, throw out that baggage and choose the goals that are truly most appealing to you. You may find it helpful to determine what a *worthy* goal is, and how to define it, and why this is so important.

Let's start with this fact; if you set a goal, it needs to have a core value that is based in a feeling of joy for it to be worthy of your full and sustainable attention. *Experiencing joy is the ultimate goal of every human being.* All goal setting must begin with this core value if individuals want to be motivated and remain focused on the tasks at hand which may require work and in some cases extreme dedication.

## Joy Discovered Through Immersion

Pleasure is an immediate feeling of happiness that is often short-lived and usually based on physical sensation or novelty. General happiness is a feeling that life is good. It's the idea that whatever activity you are doing is working for you. Joy however, is a higher form of happiness that is uniquely its own, and that is why it is the powerful engine that drives successful achievement of goals. So what sets joy profoundly apart from pleasure and general happiness?

*Joyousness is feeling happy thinking about and/or doing something without being self-conscious.* This is very important to understand; being self-conscious means that you are aware of the judgment of others and/or your own self-judgment while doing some activity. For example, just think how hard it is to be in fifth grade

giving your first public speaking assignment. How much more gratifying and successful would you have been had you not been completely consumed with the thought, 'Everyone is looking at me. I feel so embarrassed and scared.' Plainly put, self-conscious feelings and thoughts blot out joy and consequently can make goals like public speaking a nightmare and a perceived failure.

These feelings of self-consciousness make individuals less capable at the task at hand, and take up so much emotional and mental real estate in their minds that the wonderment and passion for the task is lost. Remember that the brain is a single processor, and as such, you cannot be immersed in a joy-filled event or thought while also thinking about yourself or others' judgments. Every self-conscious thought about a goal or activity or situation is not necessarily toxic, although some self-conscious moments can be debilitating and emotionally crushing at times. More often than not, self-conscious thoughts in a given situation act as a simple distraction from what could be complete immersion in the activity. Consequently, an individual's self-conscious thoughts displace what could have been a joyous moment.

In the state of joyous immersion in a given situation, task or goal, you lose yourself in a very exciting and profoundly good way; a *joyous* way. You feel the emotion of joy. Self-consciousness and even the sense of self-awareness that are common to everyday life are displaced by moments of complete and utter focus on a task. You become immersed in it. It is these moments of true and complete focus where true joy is experienced. In these moments of clarity, time is suspended and joy is experienced.

If we know what conditions need to be met to make immersion possible, then doesn't it make sense to hone in on those factors and actively create joy rather than simply experiencing it randomly? The answer is of course, yes! Yes, you can and should create joy through immersion.

Joy can be described as the feeling one has witnessing their child being born or watching that same child sleeping peacefully (you are immersed in the moment). It is that natural excitement you feel when you fall deeply and uncontrollably in love (you are immersed in the feelings and emotions of love). It is what we feel watching a loved one gain victory after a long battle with cancer or finally receiving a Ph.D. after years of hard work. It is the sensation that engulfs people who are doing something they truly love doing when the activity itself suspends time. It is the racecar driver on the edge and *in the zone*. In this case being *in the zone* is being immersed in the thrill of the race. Joy is the absence of self-consciousness while being engulfed in a self-expansive activity. It is the state of being as described in that one single word: immersion.

The satisfaction value of a specific happiness item is measured by the degree of fulfillment it provides. All happiness items have certain satisfaction values. The higher the values of satisfaction and fulfillment, the closer one gets to joy. The highest level of happiness is joy. Happiness is personal to each individual and can be found in a variety of activities, including taking drugs, building a career or racing a car. Each of these brings certain people happiness and certain personal values of satisfaction. If you are very satisfied, but you are still conscious of your performance or are conscious of how the activity is seen by others, then the overall value of happiness is lowered by that self-conscious feeling. That particular topmost level, joy, exists for those passions when self-consciousness is nonexistent. And while many activities may make you generally happy with a high level of satisfaction, it is only those activities when you are completely and blissfully lost in the activity that joy exists. In short, total emotional and mental immersion in the activity or situation must be present for joy to exist.

Famous racecar driver Jacques Villeneuve once said, "My goal is not to be a race car driver. The reason I am racing is because I enjoy being in the car and being on the edge." That is a simple description of joy. His career racing cars was not defined as something "he was supposed to do," or "had to do," but rather so he could be lost in bliss while "on the edge." That is immersion! That is Joy! That is bliss! The late Dale Earnhardt Sr. followed this same theme in the following quote, "Finishing races is important, but racing is more important." You can almost feel the passion in their statements and feel the car rumbling through the turns.

Generally speaking, the single greatest reason setting goals has become a lost art in Western culture's self-help industry is the complete lack of focus on joy as the core value of any goal that is worthy of human determination. They take a predetermined set of cultural values, norms, and priorities, then encourage people to set goals that fit this mold, making people mental slaves to society instead of creative expressers of personal passions. If the very foundation of any worthy goal is not first looked at through the prism of whether it will provide maximum fulfillment, then what are you saying you are worth? Really, look at that for a moment. If you are going to spend time conducting yourself in a manner that does not serve you to the fullest, then that means you have determined that you are not worth that much. Yet, there never has and never will be another you. You are uniquely special so why would you decide to shoot low on the happiness scale? Is that really how you want this to end when you look back on your life?

## What Is a Worthy Goal?

First and foremost, a worthy goal is one that you believe is worth your time, which is your most precious non-renewable resource. We believe you are worth infinitely more than being kind of happy or somewhat fulfilled. We believe that your power of free will and self-determination should be measured through how much joy you produce for yourself as well as for those around you. Of course, free will allows for you to choose a life devoid of happiness and joy. It's all up to you. However, we will move on assuming that you will decide that joy will be the future core of every goal you choose for yourself. So, as you complete your plan for personal change, we suggest that you look specifically for activities, events and relationships that might provide the best chance for immersion and to rise above your self-limiting, self-conscious thoughts.

It's important to go forward with eyes and hearts open to the truth. And the truth is that many instant-gratification activities can produce moments of complete immersion (and thus joy), but have serious negative consequences (e.g. think smoking crack). This is important. If a goal provides a path to complete immersion, yet can create painful consequences, can that goal be considered a worthy goal? Again, that depends on what you believe you are worth. If you want goals that provide brief joy (meaning they have brief immersion potential) yet also have a steep downside of negative consequences, just know that *you have decided* that a worthy goal by your definition can have negatives consequences.

Make sure you know that there are other paths that have little or not downside. There are always more productive ways to live one's life. There are always ways to improve your self-worth. There are always options available to value your choices on a higher standard with less emotional pain.

So as you review the goals on your top 10 list, make sure your eyes look past the goal and ask yourself if that particular set of choices will have any downside. If so, your definition of a worthy goal is one that accommodates certain levels of discomfort. The alternative is to find the infinite number of goals you could pick from that are relatively pain free. Therefore, your idea of a worthy goal would be one that results in benefits only. This means that you would have decided to choose goals that are to your benefit with minimum or no downside.

Of course there are those goals that include the threat of possible self-limiting consequences or the threat of pain both emotionally and physically. The racecar driver has the threat of death at every corner. Does the driver go into this career with eyes open? Does his spouse understand

and agree that he would be miserable not being a racecar driver? The point is that nothing is black and white and this is why the first criterion for exploration of possible worthy goals began with the earlier happiness lists you wrote. It starts the ball rolling on the right track. Then you looked for those happiness items that would align with your passions. Then you converted them into full goals with more specific targets, methods, and timelines.

Most goals, if based on a happiness list will have a high immersion potential (and thus a high potential for feeling joy), and typically will have limited negative consequences. This, then, develops into a high-level worthy goal because it serves to benefit the individual and those around him. For instance, some guests have described what they want out of a future marital relationship. These same individuals later find their mate, get married and have wonderful marriages that have many moments of immersion. But with love there is an inherent risk of vulnerability and the possibility of hurt feelings and arguments. Nevertheless, the immersion potential was so profoundly great that the threat of pain and failure were risks worth taking.

It becomes quite easy to achieve joy if you look for activities that allow for immersion potential for you and your loved ones. If you are satisfied and happy as a result of attaining your goals, you can then be an inspiration for those less fortunate, or those who might be having a hard time. The famous motivational speaker, Earl Nightingale said, "Treat every person you meet as if they are the most important person in the world and see what happens." It may seem contradictory to you now, but this advice is simply another pathway to serving yourself. Remember that everyone is connected and by serving those around you, you serve yourself. Think about it this way; if you don't treat each interaction as important, then you must not value your own time very much. This says a lot about your sense of self-worth. Make your time valuable by treating each interaction as valuable. In serving yourself, you naturally gain more, which you then can provide to others, and so on. It is the endless cycle of giving and receiving with ever-increasing levels of emotional resources and potential for sustainable joy. It is an upward spiral!

We all know of people who have done amazing things with their lives. There are countless stories of people beating the odds: poor kids who become hardworking millionaires, handicapped or sick people who overcome their afflictions and achieve their dreams, and so on. The immense successes of Dr. Stephen Hawking or Helen Keller are testaments to these ideals. Any hardships or handicaps you may have to overcome most likely pale in comparison. It is time now to discard all your excuses for failure and begin living your dreams.

Immersion can truly change your life, which in turn can change the world. Immersion-based goals give people the drive that propels them through hard times. In people who have goals that they are passionate about, an internal fire powers them through whatever life throws at them.

## Create an *Attitude of Immersion*

Many times we hear our guests explain their current circumstances, and they struggle to find any immersion potential in their possible options for the immediate future. Let us look at a typical example. A woman received her second drunk driving offense and lost her license and must now spend thirty days in jail. While she listed many happiness list items that could produce a high level of positive focus and results, (immersion), she also must serve her time in jail, and that can dampen her spirit. This is where an *attitude of immersion* can make all the difference.

The many exciting goals that she wrote down cannot occur until after she has spent that time in jail. With an attitude of immersion being cultivated internally, she can then make the best of the situation and have a positive attitude about her jail sentence. The jail sentence now becomes just another item on her happiness list. In other words, her happiness list item might be to go to jail and be a positive force for the other inmates she meets while incarcerated. Or she may use her time to read and educate herself, build personal patience, and other characteristics that will prepare her for a brighter future. This new attitude converts challenges you might face while in pursuit of your dreams to a more positive experience. In simple terms, an attitude of immersion is necessary when negative current circumstances need to be faced or rectified.

As we noted in previous chapters, the lesson taught by Viktor Frankl was that "you choose your attitude." In his case, he viewed his horrific circumstances as a challenge to be overcome on the way to rewriting his book and bringing his work to the world. He viewed his time in the concentration camps as an opportunity to observe and learn about others. He made it meaningful. You can assign whatever meaning you want to your personal struggles and obstacles.

Nothing in the physical world can stop the human spirit, especially if it is driven to succeed. A goal is the endpoint of a personal vision. With this in sight, the process becomes extremely efficient and focused. Your internal compass will guide you through the rough terrain that may exist along the way. The world's future lies in the dreams of those who have the courage and tenacity to make their dreams come true.

There will be many supporting goals that will transform you from your current counterproductive self-images to the new more productive ones. But here is how you can make the most progress: *focus on the goals in which you can be most immersed*. These are goals in which you are both passionate about the outcome or endpoint, but also feel that you can lose yourself in most or all of the actions required in making them a reality. Toward this end, we're now going to ask you to review your top 10 goals, and rank them in order from 1 to 10 by how much immersion potential each goal holds for you. Again, this will be done by considering both your personal passion

for the endpoint, and the degree to which you think you can be immersed in the entire process. With immersion comes joy. With joy comes the natural fruition of worthy goals. With the fruition of worthy goals comes the foundation of a worthy life.

Remember that a worthy goal is one that harms no one and helps bring about happiness or positive emotion to everyone touched by the goal or touched by the process of attaining the goal. Worthy goals must also be motivated by passion, not only for the goal itself, but for the activities required to achieve it.

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## CHAPTER 36

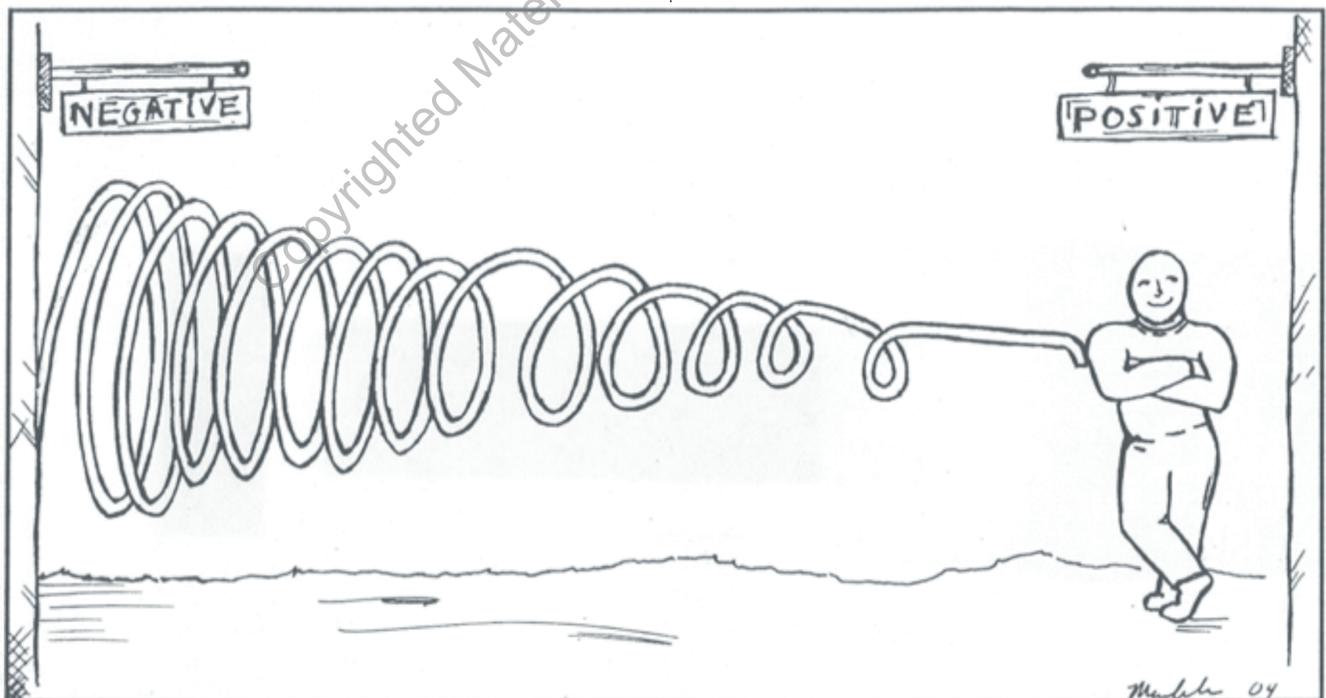
## Complete the Plan

*“The rung of a ladder was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold a man’s foot long enough to enable him to put the other somewhat higher.”*

– Thomas Henry Huxley, British biologist

The goal of the Life Movements portion of the curriculum is to help you discover your happier life options, and to build plans to pursue them. It is, as always, your choice whether you pursue happier options, or stick with the safety of low-satisfaction choices. If you choose to put

sustained effort into pursuing your goals and fulfilling your new self-images, you will, without a doubt, experience change in a positive direction. This effort will put you into the Success Stage of the spring of life:



The Success Stage represents the point where you've worked so hard to stretch the spring that you've created a new mental set-point for yourself, through self-directed neuroplasticity and personal change. The spring has been stretched so far to the positive side that it supports increasingly happier thoughts and choices as your new norm. It's the point where it no longer feels like a massive effort to move forward in life, and where the curveballs that life throws at us become easier and easier to dodge, thanks to the resistance and support of the spring.

Instead of looking for support externally, people in the Success Stage have built it internally.

Now you're going to do one more exercise to bring all your Life Movements work together into simple workable plan.

We have discussed passion, immersion, and "worthy goals" in great depth, with good reason, so that you can choose the goals that are most relevant, exciting, and motivating in your life. Having considered these issues throughout the process and having built several specific goals, we now ask that choose the top three that you think you can passionately immerse yourself in pursuing over the next year.

The reason for this is focus. Another reason people write goals but fail to pursue them is because they often create too many goals at once, and it becomes overwhelming to someone who has been living reactively and in directionless pursuit of whims. They set goals with good intentions, but then they don't spend enough time on any one goal to make it a reality and see a payoff. They spread themselves so thin that the goals lose their motivational power. In the midst of the chaos, they often give up quickly, and revert to easier choices from the past.

This isn't to say that they lose control, or they break down because they're weak. It's just that they don't make a plan that builds motivation; they make a plan that is scattered, and thus their behavior becomes scattered. We don't know the ideal number of goals for you to pursue. Oftentimes, one big goal can be so consuming and immersive that it's enough to create massive change in one's life. But then the next person may happily pursue 20 goals at the same time, rapidly completing them or re-evaluating and replacing some goals along the way. We're going to recommend you pick 3 big exciting goals that you think will provide you with plenty of daily action in order to create lasting change in your life over the next year.

You have done great work in setting many goals, but now it's time to focus your attention and build a streamlined plan of change.

## Full Personal Development

Let us review our goal-setting objectives:

**Objective 1:** Make the big *choice to believe that you are worth more* than you've provided yourself in the past. This means replacing self-limiting thoughts with self-expansive thoughts (i.e. replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts). Develop a new self-image of who you want to be; one that reflects your choice to increase your self-worth. Create a big picture vision of what you want your happier life to look and feel like.

**Objective 2:** Shatter your *perceptions of what you are capable of* doing and having in the future. Think beyond self-limiting thoughts and vague wishes to end pain and allow yourself to dream of happier options. Get more specific about the new activities and achievements that may help you to fulfill your new self-image. Exercise the courage to come up with real life options that will make you happier.

**Objective 3:** Build a series of detailed goals *with actionable steps that you can take* to pave the road to your new self-images. What choices are within your power to make your dreams a reality? Find out and write them down into a plan of action. Re-evaluate and update these goals consistently. Set new ones when you achieve the old ones.

**Objective 4:** Build positive, more mature relationships. Combining Objectives 1, 2 and 3 will create the trust that may be currently missing in your relationships. The idea is to become mature, stable, and happy. These positive changes will be noticed by the people around you and true changes will occur quite naturally. People will see that you really are a different person and over time they will become less concerned about you continuing any hurtful behavior. The risks of a reconciliation discussion may then be perceived as minimal, giving them a desire to patch things up.

We have given you detailed information and exercises on how to achieve the first 3 objectives already. Before we move on to step four in detail, let us review on a macro level for a moment. You now know, to some degree, what makes you happy. You know what future behaviors and actions you need to accomplish to help you become happier. You have begun living by the axioms described in the earlier chapters. You have identified self-limiting negative emotions and thoughts, and identified the positive thoughts to replace them. You have an accurate chronicle of your past and current choices and behaviors. You have a new set of self-images that define who you want to become. And now you have highly detailed goals. You have all the information and practice needed to be

confident in moving through the first three objectives. If you feel that you don't, please don't be afraid to ask your presenter for a review of them.

The following topics may give you insight on how to work *Objective 4* for full personal development. They can be added to your daily regimen as you move forward with your life plan.

The four topics are:

- Humility
- Charity
- Reflection
- Prayer

While anyone can benefit from these topics, the fourth topic, prayer, is rejected by most atheists. This makes imminent sense because of the common current religious definition of prayer. Often atheists, agnostics, and many others, reject prayer based on its religious overtone. "People pray to God," is the common understanding of prayer in our Western culture. However, when we discuss prayer in this text, we use the older concept of prayer that is totally non-religious.

The word prayer, literally, means to "ask" or "petition" in Middle English (circa Eleventh Century through 1470). At that time, prayer was not connected with religion, religious beliefs, or religious practices, nor was it considered exclusively a communication with a deity. During the Middle Ages, one might say to a friend, "I pray your forgiveness." Thus, the praying, i.e. asking or petitioning, is not contrary to atheism or agnosticism. Atheists and agnostics are free to pray to the universe, which is real, or to their own inner existence, which is also real. In any case, we encourage you to keep in mind that our discussion of prayer should not exclude anyone because of their personal beliefs whether religious or non-religious. Those with religious beliefs need little in the way of lessons on prayer. Religious prayer is well-known to those with religious backgrounds and so we will leave that discussion up to those in religious communities.

Certain aspects of life have shown that humility, charity, reflection and prayer are used during times of extreme emotional pain. Because life circumstances can be unexpected and emotionally painful at times, the four concepts have great value to help us get through challenging times. This is true regardless of religious or ethnic or cultural backgrounds. The four concepts are generally universal (although each culture manifests them with their own specific meanings).

Dianne, a woman who struggled with drinking too much wine and depression problems for years after a bitter divorce, tells of her conflict-based transformation, "I decided to really search for an answer to my misery because I was in such a debilitating state of depression. I was tired of the nagging thoughts of suicide and hate. Once I opened my mind, the least little bit, I suddenly saw things from a different perspective. This was really unexpected. I was immediately filled with optimism and everything looked brighter. My thoughts were clear. I was totally baffled as to how this happened. For more than two years I had struggled, constantly wondering why my life was so hard. But then I broke through, and I knew that I could love and be loved. I was changed. Somehow, I think that all my searching just came full circle. As time has gone on that initial transformative feeling has faded, but the memory is as bright as the moment it happened, and I hang onto that when things get tough. But, I can say this. I am different because I know that I am a good person. I think I just made the decision to see things differently and a door opened. Prior to that, I was stuck and unwilling to change. I thought I wanted to change, but I realize now that I was stuck in my own negative thinking. Once I made the decision to really open up to other possibilities, the flood gates opened. It was a gift, but I think my change of *heart* was the real catalyst."

This chapter looks at cases like Dianne's and asks some fundamental questions. How can people become more open to experiences like hers? Why was she given this gift of insight, when so many others ask and seem not to receive? The answers are not straightforward, because different people have different personal experiences, beliefs and perspectives. Nevertheless, we looked for the commonalities in cases like hers, and we have seen many in the decades we have been helping people. We have sought to find how those who are suffering are able to open themselves to greater personal insight, clarity, and relief.

Daily habits of humility, charity, reflection, and prayer can by their very nature attract positive options to you so you won't have to work so hard to create them. These habits cannot replace planning and action but they can be added to your planning and goal-setting to foster more positive energy in an already improving life position. In essence, they add fuel to an already lit flame.

Has anyone ever told you to listen to your heart? If you find that you are filled with anxiety and fear, it's worth taking the time each day to slow down and analyze why you feel the way you do. Everyone has the ability to reflect on life and adjust for better results. People throughout history have been able to create a personal atmosphere that welcomes these life-changing experiences. Buddhists

have a long rich history of attaining this level of self-awareness. It has been documented that high intensity professional athletes break through to different levels of transcendent experiences. And then, of course, there are the more common cases of people such as Dianne who are struck by a life-changing experience because they opened their minds in times of turmoil and profound reflection.

We do not want to give the impression that you must experience pain in order to want or feel the need to pray, be humble, reflect or give charity. Sure, these habits can be formed in your daily life at a time of emotional struggle, and yes, they will help tremendously, but once you grow past that crisis, these habits can catapult you forward at an accelerated pace into a much more satisfying life. That is where the real value lies. If you are living the positive column of the Thought Process Chart, you are already successfully practicing some of these habits. If you are thinking of others and checking your motives, you are already reflecting on your behavior. If you have been doing this, then you are already building new habits. Now the question becomes: "What do I need to do in order to open my heart and mind to greater insight on effective methods to accomplish my goals?"

Let's start with a brief discussion on humility and why this might be important at this stage of your development.

## Humility

Becoming humble, or gaining humility, is the process of gaining an accurate understanding of oneself and giving an accurate honest presentation of oneself to the world. Let's say you are a top-seeded semi-pro tennis player. If someone asks you, "Are you a good tennis player?", and you reply, "I'm OK, I keep it between the lines." That is not being humble or showing humility, it is condescending and dishonest. While your motive may have been to avoid sounding arrogant, no one ever shows humility by inaccurately stating what and who they are. There is no reason to avoid presenting your current learned talents in a gracious manner. A more appropriate response to this question would be, "Yes, I've been training and playing for many years and I hope to become even better. I'm still learning. How about you? Do you play?"

On the other hand, arrogance is the process of overstating one's talents and abilities or demonstrating them with little regard for others' feelings. The person asking the question deserves an honest answer. The talents one has cultivated throughout life should not be hidden or arrogantly overstated. An accurate statement about who you are at any given moment in time is the humble

answer. Humility means truthfully declaring your defining characteristics with dignity and graciousness.

## Charity

Charity is when you help people or situations and receive no direct benefit. Acts of anonymous kindness, random good deeds, love, and donations of money or time are all acts of charity. The only benefit you will get happens inside of you. In short, you experience joy. If you give anonymously, you will instantly feel good.

Because all people are connected to everything that is living, a full circle of positivity occurs. You are the only person that will see the good deed being done (assuming it is done anonymously). The joyous feeling you get is from within, not the result of human approval associated with recognition for good deeds. If you want to feel joy, love others anonymously every day. You will discover a wealth of untapped resources, and you will begin to learn how to love yourself.

## Reflection

Reflection is the internal process of calming yourself enough to hear what your emotions and past actions are telling you. This helps you measure your performance and then problem solve. How is it that some people have the ability to remain calm and focused in the most chaotic situations? The answer is that they are practiced at reflecting and then putting in place the necessary actions to solve problems and challenges. Reflection does not have to take place in a peaceful setting. It simply means concentrating, reflecting on past experiences, and then using that knowledge to your benefit and to the benefit of those around you.

Reflection can be even more beneficial when you have the time to look at your day in peaceful surroundings. Then it only takes a few moments to examine your day and ask yourself whether or not you made the best use of it. Have you succeeded in your goals? Have you found your days are running more smoothly since you became committed to personal change? Do you feel less anxiety? Are you concentrating on your fears or on your next task? Are you happy? These are the typical questions of a reflective person.

There are times in life when you face challenges and negative situations just as Dianne did. These situations are made much worse by hysterical fear-ridden thinking. As she put it, "For more than two years I struggled, constantly wondering why my life was so hard." This thinking created a mental downward spiral that could only

be turned around through active reflection and a sincere desire to think rationally. Dianne goes on to say, “I think I just made the decision to see things differently and a door opened. Before that, I was stuck and unwilling to change. I thought I wanted to change, but I realized that I was stuck in my own thoughts. Once I made the decision to really open up to other possibilities, the floodgates opened. It was a gift, but I think my change of heart was the real catalyst.”

With a sincere desire to practice this mental and emotional control through consistent reflection comes a natural self-directed neuroplastic change. This creates an upward spiral that further supports the decision to reflect, adapt and change as an individual. When fearful thinking dominates your thoughts you procrastinate, thus delaying the necessary brain changes. It’s important to pause in your fearful chaos long enough to reflect, and then make the necessary positive mental adjustments. By taking the time to reflect honestly on the most positive course of action, you can avoid misery and get through any setback or difficulty.

How does someone reflect? It is actually quite simple. Concentrate on your personal performance and focus on changing your point of view about subjects that trouble you. You can start by finding a quiet place without distractions. Turn off the television, radio, or computer. Then begin thinking about whether or not you have been loving, tolerant, positive, charitable, and productive throughout your day and in your recent past. With some practice you will begin to rewire the brain which will make the process faster and easier each time you do it. Eventually, reflection becomes a reflex. In other words, it becomes a natural analytical thought process and you will no longer need quiet time to reflect. With enough practice you will begin to experience insight and a dramatic change of heart the way Dianne did. You will tap into a different state of mind, one based on forgiveness and charity, rather than on self-preservation, guilt and negativity. You will realize that you are worthy of being happy and peaceful.

Like any other mind-based exercise, reflection does not have to follow any particular ritual. The basics of reflection are really just a process of concentrating on how you have conducted yourself and whether you have been living the actions and thoughts set forth in the Thought Process Chart. As the weeks and months go by, if you are diligent with this process, you will begin to be able to identify the negative thoughts and behaviors that are pulling you down as they happen. You will gain confidence and begin to trust in your own internal voice. Actions and choices that used to bring trouble and depression will become distant memories. They will be replaced with care, acts

of charity, and productive mature living. No one can promise a transcendent experience like Dianne’s. But if the history of human nature is an indicator, you can expect a brighter perspective on the world as you practice listening to your heart and being charitable.

The most powerful effect of reflection is not the understanding of where you personally may have failed or succeeded that particular day, although this is important. Rather, it is the unexpected insights you will gain while in the reflective state. The byproduct of reflection can come in the form of answers to questions you have struggled with for years, such as new insights into complicated emotional troubles. The simple truth is that most people do not gain new solutions to old problems because they rarely spend the time being open to new solutions. Don’t miss the beauty of life because you were unwilling to relax and see a new path. There are always answers to even the most complicated problems. They exist and are there for you; all you need to do now is stop and listen.

## Prayer

You will remember that our conception of prayer does not require any religious beliefs. We include this topic to help satisfy the questions we receive from the many guests in our residential programs who want to pray and gain a greater understanding of the petitioning conception of prayer. We described prayer as asking or making a request. On the other hand, reflection is being quiet enough to hear the answer. But what is most important is both prayer and reflection are available to everyone. We make no distinction about who you are asking and this keeps us out of the religious context of prayer. In other words, praying is an internal dialogue; whether that be to God, your heart, your mind, the universe or whatever you choose.

Why is prayer important? Many people lack faith in a positive future and simply forget the power of choice that lies inside of them. They lose the ability to listen and converse with their heart and conscience. In these faithless, dark moments, prayer is a way to remember the connection they have with other people, and their own internal power. Many atheists experience desperate moments in their lives and prayer comes quite naturally to them as well.

Simply put, prayer is a verbal or mental reminder that that you will be okay through hard times. The process of prayer is not unlike the way children talk to themselves while walking by a cemetery at night. Though scared and alone, the internal and external dialogue helps them

through it. It is a process of concentrating on the good during the bad. It is ultimately what gives soldiers the courage and strength to persevere in spite of their fear.

Another example of prayer's positive effect can be seen in a person grieving for a lost loved one. At these times the emotional pain can seem beyond human endurance. In the first stages of the grieving process many people feel as if they cannot go on with life. They feel as if they will be sad forever. Yet after that initial period of time, and much internal dialogue (prayer), most people recover and are able to see the world in a positive light once again. For many, prayer is necessary in the process of healing the heart when they feel separate from the internal light that guides them.

Prayer, in conjunction with acts of charity, humility, and reflection can help create a more solid foundation for a joyful existence. The four together make it nearly impossible to lose faith even when human troubles, whether self-created or otherwise, seem insurmountable.

## Stop Worrying

*There is only one way to happiness and that is to cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of our will.* - Epictetus

Worrying is a completely useless, even counterproductive, activity. The Dalai Lama XIV reportedly observed that there are only two things in life about which people worry: things they can change and things they cannot. This is an important distinction to recognize. If you are worried about things you can change, stop worrying, get busy and change whatever needs to be changed. But if you are worried about things you cannot change, stop it, because all of your worrying will not change a thing. In either case and instead of worrying, add charity, humility, reflection, and prayer to your new lifestyle and you may find the insights and strength to tackle challenges you thought were impossible to change. These activities will kick start a depressed and heavy heart, and could be just the path to insight you need to further your personal progress.

## Stay Focused on Action

Your completed plan will include:

- Your new self-images
- Your personalized thought process chart
- Your top 3 goals on which you will focus for the next year

You don't need to worry about external support or studying the SJP textbook in order to secure lasting change and happier choices for yourself. All you need is the direction of a focused personalized plan of action. Keep your plan handy and it will guide you to change. The thought process chart is simple, and working it only requires your attention. The goals, however, may require many new actions to be carried out daily. You have laid out the basic steps, but each day may require a new action if you want to make progress toward achieving them. So, there are two basic questions you can ask yourself as you look at your plan each day:

- What can I do today to practice the thoughts on my chart?
- What steps can I take to move closer to achieving my goals today?

Remember, life is a succession of moments. Goals serve to unify and direct the choices you make in those moments. If you are focused solely on the endpoint you will miss each moment and likely delay or stop progress. Focus on what you can do today. Make it a priority to always know the next step you can take toward the achievement of each of your goals. And when those goals are completed, or cease to offer you enough immersion potential and direction, go back through the goal-setting process in order to revise your plan.

## Summary

You can certainly move on in your life without defined goals, humility, charity, reflection and prayer, but this might leave you more susceptible to being negatively affected by changing circumstances. It doesn't make sense to come all this way and then leave your future to chance, inaction, worry and the fear of change. Life Movements is about self-directed proactive change. You are now aware of the tools you already possess to carry out such change.

The lessons contained in this curriculum will mean little if you did not properly complete all the preparatory work in previous chapters. If you did not take the process of replacement seriously, if you avoided self-examination in your personal history, then you should expect to achieve somewhat limited results. You cannot realize your new self-images using the same thoughts and actions you used in the past. It is impossible to make progress without the occasional scary moments associated with change and vulnerability to love again. If you sit relaxed in your comfort zone expecting the curriculum (program) to do

the work for you, you are simply not living in reality.

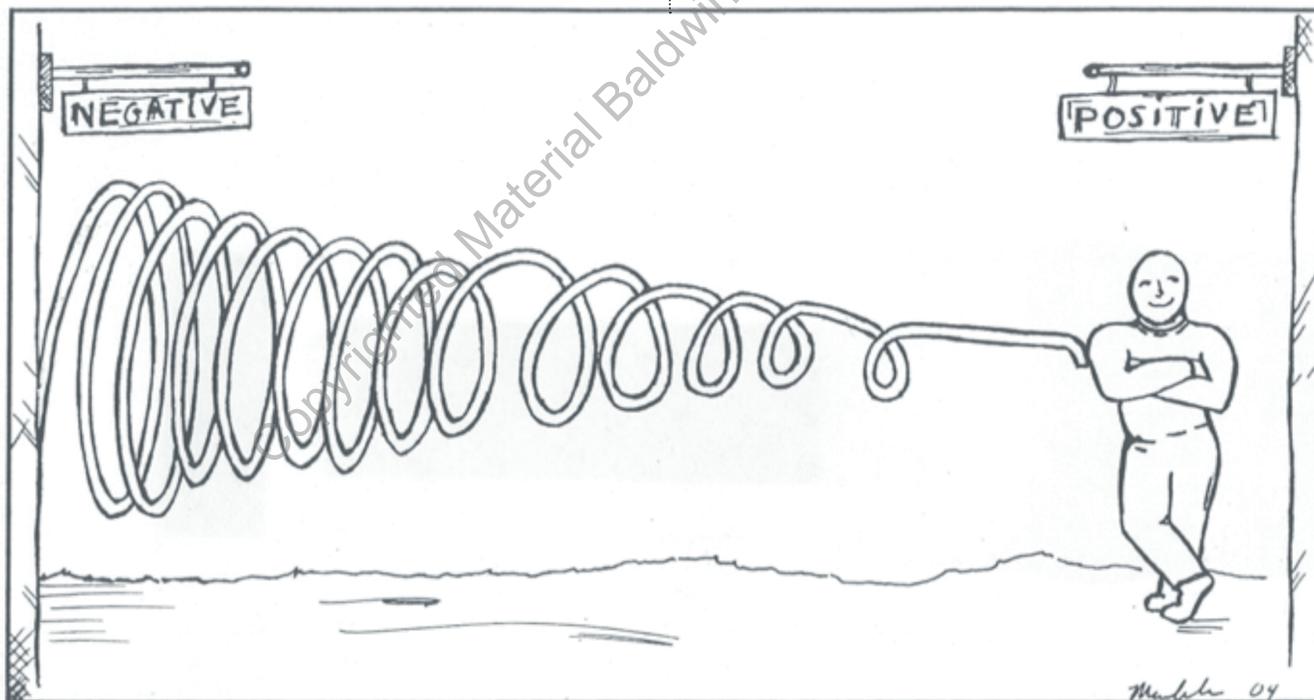
*Please keep in mind that this program does not change anyone.* The text and related workbook lessons cannot magically reach inside of you and change how you act or who you are. The SJP® provides clear-cut directions on how you can change yourself. You are responsible for what you get out of this program, just as you are responsible for your own life. All of the ability lies within you. If the SJP® were the power that changed people, participants would always need to have the text handy and be in correspondence with the CBE Presenters. In fact, we encourage all of our guests to move on with their lives. The program's goal is that you become a fully functioning person, not within a program, not in some support group setting, but rather in the absence of a program or "support group." In other words, you are truly free and fully self-empowered!

Because the axioms are the basis for how the human existence works, we will list them here one more time. If you apply nothing from this curriculum but the Five Axioms, you are already ahead of where you started! Now make the choice to remain steadfast on your new goals list and apply the axioms in everything you do!

- 1. Change is constant.**
- 2. You are what you think.**
- 3. Happiness is the only cognitive motivator in the human condition.**
- 4. There is no shortcut to sustainable, stable, long-term happiness.**
- 5. Your happiness is in your own hands.**

You can use the axioms to stretch the spring of life whenever you want. Because people are constantly changing and evolving creatures, happier options are always available, throughout your entire life cycle. Life becomes easier when not working against the axioms:

Now go to the workbook, and learn how to assemble your focused plan of action for the next year.



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## CHAPTER 37

# To Be Free

*“Men acquire a particular quality by constantly acting a particular way... you become just by performing just actions, temperate by performing temperate actions, brave by performing brave actions.”*

– Aristotle

We know that the last few chapters have been fairly mechanical and are based on spending much time and effort writing and filtering ideas and dreams, but these very mechanics change people. The human experience is an emotional one that is governed by your thoughts and actions. Should your thoughts and actions be driven by goals and aspirations to be more developed and more fulfilled, then your life includes those qualities. Should you avoid self-examination, then you have chosen to live with the consequences attendant with avoiding self-examination. Keep uppermost in your mind that to win in life is much easier than the path of inaction. The path of lethargy ends in places that most people do not want to be. Guide your own life and habits to match your dreams and new self-images and you will have fulfilled the reason you are alive, and that is – *to be happy*.

Over the course of more than two decades thousands of people have asked our CBE® instructors these questions: “Why am I so unhappy?” and “Why do most people I meet struggle so much?” There are no simple answers to these kinds of questions. The varying circumstances, experiences and individual problems are infinite. However, by examining mankind’s misery throughout history and relying on decades of experience working with troubled individuals, we can say with some conviction that the much of this misery comes from the unwillingness of people to care for each other.

Purpose, satisfaction and happiness all stem from each individual’s beliefs and the actions driven by those beliefs.

If people remain centered in self-limiting thoughts and actions, their world can become very small and their life exhausting. It is only through personally-driven desires for happiness, purpose and fulfillment that people are motivated to improve their own lives and then become willing to help those around them. If you spend time manipulating and controlling others to serve your wants and needs, with little consideration for their feelings, wants and needs, you avoid the responsibility of caring for others and being truly compassionate. On the other hand, if you live by the principles of compassion and kindness, you will naturally devote your career, family life and spare time to the service of others. This lifestyle requires commitment, perseverance and hard work but in the long run offers limitless rewards.

Everything you have learned in this program takes some amount of work. Positive personal change and the ability to adapt to a constantly shifting landscape can be challenging. Some of the lessons may have been obvious to you while others may have brought forth moments of dramatic clarity and emotion. Sometimes wisdom is there for the eye to see, but does not become internalized until just the right moment when everything comes together. The Golden Rule: treat others as you want to be treated, is so simple; and yet probably one of the greatest challenges each person encounters in their daily lives.

As you complete this process and move on applying the axioms and lesson plan, it is important to remain open to each lesson’s insight. Be thorough and committed to

see this process through to completion and continue to reevaluate your choices as needed. Question everything from this day forward and listen to your heart. Analyze and examine every decision you make, especially as you are building your life from here. And remember that you are supposed to be happy. It is now time for you to actively create your future and positively influence the lives of those around you.

## Moving On

Working with thousands of substance users over the last several years we have observed some common patterns as people return home. When interviewed, most post-program guests describe themselves as successful while others describe their self-imposed struggles. In an effort to increase the percentage of the successful demographic, we will take a few pages to explain the difference between those who report they are successful and those who report they are not. We hope this will help to clarify a path to success for you, and help you to avoid some of the most common mistakes people make. There is no reason for you to repeat the mistakes others have made.

## I Failed Because...

When we interviewed past guests of the program, we encountered those who identified themselves as successful as well as those who reported that they “failed.” It is important for us to first look at those program graduates who placed themselves in the failed category, so as to gain an understanding of what happened and how and why they continued to struggle.

For most graduates who reported failure, their definition of failure is defined by continued substance use on some level. Many family members also used this definition when reporting that a loved one had failed after leaving the program. This is understandable as our culture largely defines success for “addicts” as complete abstinence, although data shows the majority of problematic substance users can and do moderate their usage.

Of those who reported failure they fell into two distinct categories: those who took responsibility for their choice to continue problematic substance use (very small percentage), and those who blamed their personal weakness/disease, external events, circumstances, and stimuli for their usage (the majority).

## Placing Blame: Self (Powerlessness)

For many people who reported that they failed, they continued to see themselves as weak and powerless. Many of these people remained committed to the idea

they truly cannot control their thoughts and behaviors. Some of these people even reported that they were too “sick” or were suffering from mental or emotional problems that rendered them incapable of doing the program successfully.

With respect to families with whom we spoke, they reported that if they saw that their loved one did not abstain after returning home from this program, they, too, perceived their loved one as failing, even if the individual reported that they enjoyed getting high and drunk. The family’s description of the events following the perceived failure event included a description of how clearly sick their loved one is, and that they must need more extensive help than the program provided. For some this perceived failure only served to validate that their loved one is damaged, suffering from a mental disorder or disease, and is powerless. Additionally many families reported that any choice that included substance use was a personal failure of their loved one even in cases where the program graduate had improved in many areas of life and reported feeling successful.

## Placing Blame: External (The SJP Failed)

A more common theme among those who reported that they were unsuccessful is blaming external events, circumstances, people and stimuli. In some cases these program graduates blamed the Saint Jude Program saying that it failed them.

This transfer of responsibility from the individual to the program is an interesting, but irrational, illogical, and emotional progression. One can easily see that blaming the program, rather than their own choices, is a way to ease the emotional pain their behavior causes those around them. It also can serve to relieve the guilt they feel from their continued problematic usage. These people use this rationale to resist change and avoid the hard work of adapting to life’s changes and responsibilities. They believe that the program should have had some sort of power over them, and continue to wield that power long after they have left. They, then, rationalize that this “mythical program power” must be defective; (i.e. “The program didn’t work.”) This rationale is, of course, flawed; consider that programs (and people associated with programs) cannot change anyone – only people, themselves, can effect change within themselves, if they choose to change. Unfortunately many family and friends of these graduates who witness their continued struggles buy into the idea that the program failed further reinforcing that the substance user is powerless and therefore incapable of change.

Think about it: if the program teaches responsibility, which it does, but those who perceive themselves as unsuccessful believe that the program and the concept of personal responsibility doesn't work, well then...for them, the concept of personal responsibility, itself, is ineffective. Obviously, their assertion that the program has failed them is, in fact, in support of their ongoing objective to abdicate their personal responsibility for their choices. So once again, they feel victimized by the "system," in this case the program and the concept of personal responsibility. Thus, these self-perceived unsuccessful individuals continue their lives devoid of personal responsibility and remain unchanged.

### **Placing Blame: External (The Cultural Connection)**

The third common theme among the self-reported unsuccessful demographic is blaming a variety of external factors; including events, people and stressors. For this group they have maintained that their substance usage is connected to life events that all people must face. Whether they blame a traumatic event from their past or one that happened after returning home, or the stress of returning home itself, these graduates cling to the idea that they are powerless to take control of life. They continue to feel victimized by life and what they believe is their faulty thinking. They choose not to take a more proactive role in their own lives and thus allow circumstances to dictate their behaviors.

There is an obvious contrast between those with stories of post-program success and those with unsuccessful stories that must be noted here. In cases where individuals view themselves as successful, they take full credit and ownership for their success, as they should. But the "failure" group had just the opposite perception. In these cases, blame almost always progressed from a personal choice to external causes such as the program and life's unavoidable stresses.

The reaction of the "unsuccessful" group is certainly understandable, despite the fact that it is wholly inaccurate, self-serving and ultimately detrimental. If they take credit for choosing to use, rather than blaming the program or other external circumstances, then they must deal with the responsibility and consequences of that choice. Consequently they also become completely able to make changes at any point in time if they so desire.

Please understand this order of blame from self to external is a foolproof technique to ensure that the substance user can continue to get high, drunk and remain a victim of circumstance by attaching a "cause" to their usage that

is out of their control. (We, of course, all know that in reality these are reasons for choosing to use, not causes.) But when you attach external "causes" even those that are self-created, you have a ready-made excuse for "failure" anytime it serves you. And many who stay in this group feel justified in their self-righteous indignation whenever those around them become upset, angry or impose consequences for their substance use choices.

Many who place themselves in the unsuccessful category maintain a belief that they must have ongoing external support to stay sober/clean. They may not like 12-step support groups, but feel that there should be group support among SJP graduates and tell their families that they are lonely and depressed and that is why they keep using. They consistently tie their choice to use substances by their perceived lack of a support structure, and thus once again place blame on the program for not providing one. Because of our cultural beliefs, this too seems viable to the families and loved ones.

While these beliefs are propagated and reinforced by treatment programs and Western society in general (most of the world does not hold onto these beliefs), this coddling and continuing "need for support" philosophy is a surefire way to hinder maturing out of problematic behaviors. It can slow or completely stop the process of building self-efficacy and self-confidence. Following this logic, some "unsuccessful" former guests' seek to be coddled, demanding that everyone acquiesce to their every want and insecurity. They try to manipulate all those who remain willing to play their game. This usually consists of family and friends that are most frightened for their safety and unable to think rationally about how best to proceed.

It is important to keep in mind that the program spent much time on interpersonal relationships, and how all people are interconnected whether they like it or not. While building successful, loving, nurturing relationships can lead to greater levels of personal happiness and satisfaction, this is not to be confused with requiring ongoing support to stay sober and drug free. Support groups and addiction counseling tie people to the alcoholic/addict identity, reinforce feelings of personal powerlessness and set people apart allowing them to think that their life is somehow harder than those without these problems. The key to avoiding loneliness is actively caring for others and building strong relationships with those you love; and seeking new relationships with people you find inspiring and uplifting.

## Building the Life You Truly Want

So, why discuss possible failure scenarios in the last chapter? The answer is simple; the St. Jude Program® is based on individual autonomy and choices. We want you to be aware of how wonderful your life can be, or how perceived failure can develop into a real state of misery by the insidious progression from blaming self, where individuals take ownership of their own failings, to the total abdication of personal responsibility. Blaming external circumstances and events is where powerlessness and depression reign.

If you see yourself progressing down the path of avoidance of responsibility for your choices, then stop, reevaluate and begin the short trek back to your new self-images and goals.

Unfortunately we have seen this blame game play out for some with horrendous consequences, and this is the singular reason for unmasking the charade right now. You need not ever go down that path! If you do find yourself heading down the path of placing blame outside yourself rather than developing strategies for success and personal responsibility, you now know that you can change that course at any moment and get back to stable ground and begin anew.

Keep in mind that it is solely up to you to create and define your own version of success or failure. With respect to substance use, both paths are your choice and the consequences are yours to own whatever they may be.

## Commencement

There is a reason graduations are called commencements. That's because they are a beginning, a new era; you are commencing to fulfill your newly established plans. As you commence with your new self-images, you have the opportunity to not waste another moment in unproductive ways. You can decide to avoid the struggles described above and build a wonderful, fulfilling and joyous life.

It's time to wrap up the entire SJP® process in a way that is logical, concise and easy to understand. Here's what you've accomplished so far.

You understand there is no disease that renders you powerless over substances and your thoughts and behaviors. You understand that you have full power to choose to use substances or remain drug-free, and that this choice is an event, not a lifelong struggle. You know that using drugs and alcohol is a quick fix leading only to short term happiness. You understand that you can now decide to use substances or not, and that this decision is independent of any other issues in your life, either positive or negative. You understand the basics of

self-directed neuroplasticity and the Freedom Model® Law of Universal Motivation. You have been taught the Five Universal Axioms. All of this knowledge can bring you to a deeper and more sustaining level of personal understanding and happiness. You have worked hard through your axiom based self-analysis to recognize the thoughts and choices that have lead you to an unsatisfying way of life.

You know where you have been at fault; therefore you know what you need to change in yourself so you can find greater purpose and satisfaction in your life. You know the path to joyous living is through adapting to an ever-changing world and maturing out of a less mature, static way of thinking and living. You've built a set of new external and internal self-images which if worked toward, will bring much greater self-worth and personal happiness.

You know that you can reconnect with your heart and mind by practicing humility, charity, prayer and reflection. You can embrace these actions as daily habits to give your life more meaning, perspective and purpose in the pursuit of your new goals. You understand that your emotions are ultimately under your control and that they serve as a gauge to help bring you more joy. You understand that talents are developed based on passion, immersion potential, and hard work.

You have allowed yourself to dream again through the four step goal-setting process. You know without your dreams and aspirations life can seem pointless and empty. You can now create a better life by working consistently toward your goals and re-evaluating them periodically. You have learned that by working toward your goals consistently, you are fulfilling your new self-images, maturing and amending yourself. This maturation allows you to repair, rebuild and strengthen your relationships with others on their terms, thus reinforcing your belief in yourself, the future and those around you. You know you can become an active participant in life bringing good-will towards all of humanity. As that occurs, you will experience a life of sheer joy and fulfillment.

And lastly, you can now move on with the knowledge that you were born as a problem-solving being, blessed with a changeable brain, an adaptable body, a free mind, a set of controllable emotions, and a group of natural axioms that are set forth so you can attain greater happiness. Armed with these truths we fervently hope you strive to achieve your dreams and build a life that benefits you and all those around you. This is, after all, why you were created.

Thank you; it has been an honor to serve you. Take good care of yourself as you continue your journey. Bon Voyage.

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